NINETY-SIX HOURS' LEAVE

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "SONIA"

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To

F. P. C.

WHO MAY STILL REMEMBER THE DAYS WHEN THE WORLD WAS AT PEACE, AND A NIGHT WHEN PRINCE BORIS ALEXANDROVITCH OF BOSNIA, SO ANNOUNCED AND SO DESCRIBED IN THE VISITORS' BOOK, ENTERED A LONDON CARAVANSERAI WITH FOUR AIDES-DE-CAMP. THE RETINUE IS SCATTERED, THE PRINCE OF A NIGHT PERISHED WITH THAT NIGHT, BUT TO ONE WHO PLAYED A ROYAL PART ROYALLY HIS DEVOTED FOLLOWER OFFERS A TOKEN OF HIS DEVOTION

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"After all, one can grow old very gradually."
ANTHONY HOPE,
"The Dolly Dialogues"

NINETY-SIX HOURS' LEAVE

CHAPTER I

CERTAIN IDLE HANDS

FULLY conscious of a slender figure and well-fitting uniform, Lieutenant Christopher Markham leaned gracefully against the counter of the telegraph office, negligently giving play to immaturely polygamous instincts.

"I think you ought to make some reduction for quantity," he suggested, with a practised and engaging smile which showed his white teeth and brown eyes to advantage. "And I've offered to pay cash, you know."

The girl behind the counter shook an unresponsive head, bureaucracy triumphing as ever over sentiment.

"Oh, if you won't, you won't," said Markham. "I don't think it's kind, though. It's a rotten cold day. We've been chased by a beastly submarine. I've only got ninety-six hours' leave . . ." He broke off disconsolately and poured a handful of silver on to the counter. "What's the damage ?"

Licking her first finger, the clerk began to turn over the sheaf of telegrams, while Markham strolled to the door and gazed out on to the crowded platform.

"Hullo, Nap!" he exclaimed, as a transport captain sidled up. "Got a decent carriage? I'll come and dig in as soon as I've got my change. I suppose you didn't think to order me a quick drink? No, you always *do* forget the important things of life."

Captain Fenwick, one-time lecturer on Aristotle's "Ethics" and Elementary Logic at St. Cedric's College, Oxford, brushed disdainfully by Markham and edged his way into the telegraph office. It was one of his many peculiarities to walk as though he were suffering from lumbago, another to speak and behave generally as though he had given up trying to be loved and aimed only at inspiring fear or hatred. Early in life he had served out tuition to students from ladies' colleges, and his soul was not yet cleansed of bitterness. The sweet girl undergraduate was to him a tousled and unstable thing, prone to tears and liable to turn its attention to Economics or the Law of Contract after half a term of his teaching. He had a feeling that no woman's spirit had been broken as he would have liked to break it, and this unsatisfied lust accompanied him to St. Cedric's, where, as Dean, he was wont to descend at midnight in pyjamas, a Burberry, and the Grand Manner to quell insurrection. The Army, recognizing his indomitable temper and unequalled mastery of exact, ordered information, timidly bribed him with successive promotions, hoping with secret ill-will that he would overreach himself.

"Why aren't the telegrams sent off?" he demanded. "You'll lose the train."

"It's a rotten sort of train," Markham rejoined unamiably. "*My* suggestion . . ."

"You're not here to make suggestions," Fenwick interrupted. "You're here to send off five telegrams."

"Six," Markham corrected him.

With bored patience Fenwick counted them on his fingers.

"One to Osborne's man to tell him to get the flat ready, one to the club for my dress clothes, one to the Turkish bath for yours, one to order dinner at the Semiramis, and one to engage a box at the Alhambra. Have you sent them all off?"

Markham nodded.

"That makes five."

"Yes, but I thought I'd make it up to the half-dozen so as to get a reduction on quantity. There's a girl . . ."

Fenwick bridled like a man whose religion is insulted.

"Cheer up, Nap," exhorted Markham. "I'm not asking you to meet her. I've never met her myself yet, but she's frightfully lovely to judge by her photo, and she's been writing to me, and all that sort of thing. Bang went ninepence, I signed myself 'Lonely Lieutenant,' and invited her to lunch to-morrow at the Semiramis Grill."

"You remind me of a rabbit," murmured Fenwick.

"She's the daughter of a land surveyor from Rhodesia," answered Markham.

"That's no justification. Get your change and come along to the carriage."

Half-way down the platform a lanky, red-haired Irishman mounted guard over a first-class smoking compartment. In apportioning work to himself and his subordinates, Fenwick had chosen him for his height and strength as the best man to fight for tea, secure evening papers, and eject intruders. Lionel Osborne was too complaisant to resent impositions, always excepting the capital imposition of War which he neither understood nor forgave. Two years earlier he had been an idle and wealthy bachelor with a large house in the County Fermanagh, a flat in St. James' Street, and a bewildering circle of friends. For eight months in the year he shot big game, for three he lounged in London, entertaining the friends sumptuously; the last he spent miserably in Ireland, seeking spaces on his crowded walls for the trophies of his gun. War had descended upon him without apology or explanation; as in a dream he found himself drilling and being drilled, receiving a commission and being sent out with a draft of the Irish Guards. Ever since, life had been uncomfortable without becoming ennobling, dangerous but not exciting.

"D'you like facin' the engine, Fenwick?" he inquired, as his companions joined him.

Nap Fenwick nodded abruptly, sidled crab-wise into the carriage, and appropriated a corner seat. In silence he consumed a cup of tea and two out of three slices of cake; in silence possessed himself of the one evening paper.

"He's impressing his personality upon you," Markham explained, with loud cheerfulness, to Osborne.

Fenwick looked up swiftly.

"You have the choice of silence or the corridor," he announced. "I can't read if you chatter."

"It looks as if I were going to *enjoy* my leave," observed Markham plaintively. "Man can't call his soul his own with Nap Fenwick about. I've a good mind to leave you two badgers . . ."

"That will do," interrupted Fenwick raspingly, and the greater part of the journey passed in silence. Osborne spread his long legs over the cushions and went to sleep, Markham dug his hands into his pockets and stared up at the lamp, while Fenwick read, calculated, organized—and robbed Markham of the last barren consolation of whistling.

The present alliance was a piece of brilliant improvisation. Fenwick had come on board knowing no one and with the prospect of four days' tiresome inactivity; Oxford, he knew, would be deserted, and he had no relations on whom to inflict himself. Yet within ten minutes he had met Markham; and the reign of terror, remembered from days when Markham organized riot and incendiarism at St. Cedric's, and Fenwick descended in Burberry and Grand Manner to extinguish them, was speedily re-established. Markham, too, had no relations in England, for his father, after long service as First Secretary in Rome, had been sent as Chargé d'Affaires to Teheran, and from Persia to South America as Minister in Santa Katarina.

It was as they tacked and ran from the pursuing submarine that Osborne had been pressed to join forces. He, it is true, was plentifully dowered with relations, but they were all inaccessible. An aunt in Onslow Gardens was as much beyond the pale as a grandfather in Manchester Square or an artistic female cousin in Cheyne Walk. "Feller can't be expected to go explorin', what?" he protested, "when he's only home on ninety-six hours' leave."

And on that word he had offered the hospitality of the St. James' Street flat to his new friends, invited them to dinner, and promised them a box at the Alhambra, provided only that they made all arrangements and refrained from bothering him until it was time to pay. To Fenwick, such an ally was beyond price; and, if he set him to carry luggage, secure tea, or retain a carriage, it was only to inculcate discipline and establish his own supremacy. The lesson was hardly needed, for Osborne was too lazy and good-natured to resist a dominant Napoleonic personality; the solvent force in the alliance was Kit Markham, who would notoriously offer a bet or accept a drink at any hour of the day or night and usually had three separate but confusing romances running concurrently. Few men can avoid being one-and-twenty, felt Fenwick from the security of thirty-two ; no man is justified in displaying the frailties of that callow period.

"Nothin' in the paper about our submarine, I suppose ? " yawned Osborne, as the train stopped rebelliously for the fourth time between stations.

Fenwick shook his head and went on reading. For several days the political situation in the Balkans had monopolized attention in England and at the Front. Greece seemed on the verge of an anti-monarchical revolution, and on the success of the Nationalist Greek rising hinged the possibility of shortening the war by many months. If the conflicting territorial claims of Bulgaria, Servia, and Greece could be accommodated, the first might be bribed into neutrality, the other two induced to march side by side with Rumania on to the Hungarian plains. Rumour had long been saying that the obstacle to a settlement was imposed by Italy, who resented any expansion by Servia towards the Adriatic. Fenwick now read that Prince Christoforo of Catania, a man of power in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was shortly expected in England on a confidential mission.

The train started again as whimsically as it had stopped, and Markham let up the carriage blind with a snap in defiance of the clearly printed Defence of the Realm Regulations.

"By Gad!" he exclaimed, looking out into the gathering darkness over a sea of glistening roofs, "we're running in, Nap! Dainty figures are waving pocket-handkerchiefs, bright eyes are exploring the windows, all that sort of thing. We're slowing down!"

"South Eastern and Chatham trains cannot slow down," Fenwick answered, with his Senior Common Room intonation, extricating his brain from the tangle of Near East politics. "Sometimes they break down, sometimes they rumble on at a reckless three miles an hour until arrested in their mad course by the buffers thoughtfully provided by the Company." There was a sudden jolt, and the train stopped. "The second alternative has been adopted here," he added.

Markham sprang to his feet and seized cap and belt from the rack.

"Dam' dirty!" he remarked disgustedly, examining with anxious brown eyes the reflection of his sharp, olive-skinned features, and smoothing his curly black hair with hasty touches of the hand. His quick movements and fastidious care of person had earned him at school the nickname of "Kitten," and the name had followed him to Oxford and the Royal Field Artillery. To call him anything but "Kitten" on the shortest acquaintance was as [illegible] as to avoid calling Angus Fenwick "Nap."

"Dam' dirty," he repeated. "My uncle George wouldn't like me to meet anyone I know till I've had time to clean up." His eye caught the reflection of a sprawling, red-headed figure, all elbows and knees, still tranquilly sleeping. "Osborne, you hog!" he roared. "Wake up! Precious time's being lost, the golden moments of our ninety-six hours' leave are slipping away. Why, man! if you'd been ready, we might have snatched a quick drink by this time."

Osborne blinked, yawned, and was beginning to withdraw his feet from the opposite cushion when Fenwick motioned him to keep his place.

"I take charge here," he announced, in his rasping voice. "No one leaves this carriage till the platform's clear."

Markham turned to him despairingly.

"But there are girls advancing in close order!" he exclaimed. "Some of them frightfully lovely, too."

"They've not come to meet you."

Markham shrugged his shoulders and subsided into his corner, flattening his nose against the window, but offering no further sign of insubordination. With one eye on the platform, Fenwick straightened his glasses, arranged his scanty wisps of fair hair, and drew on his overcoat.

"Osborne will get a taxi," he ordained; and a moment later the lanky Irishman was doubling down the platform. "The Kitten will stay here."

Markham looked with wistful eyes at the vanishing stream of people.

"Some of them *were* frightfully lovely," he said.

"Sensualist!" interjected Fenwick, and the subject dropped.

The last of the taxis had long disappeared, and Osborne had to cross the station yard and trot down Victoria Street before he found one.

"Anybody but a damned Red Hat would have wired for one from Dover," said Markham maliciously, and with a vindictive attempt to wound.

Fenwick preserved silence.

"I'm going to get a drink at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Welcome," went on Markham, who did not mind other people being silent so long as he was not prevented from talking. "My uncle George wouldn't like me to go so long without nourishment."

"Stay here!" ordered Fenwick, who, like others, had heard of that mythical avuncular reprobate, but, like others, had never met him.

"Why should I? I'm a Welcome Soldier and Sailor, and I'm devilish thirsty. What time do we dine?"

"Eight," answered Fenwick. "At the Semiramis—Restaurant, not Grill Room, so you'll have to wear a white waistcoat. While I bathe, you will shave, and Osborne can read his letters and unpack for me. While I shave, you will bathe, and Osborne will unpack for you and shave himself. While Osborne bathes . . ."

"I'm blowed if I unpack for him," Markham interrupted.

"His man will do that," said Fenwick crushingly. "Then we shall all be dressed at the same time."

Markham looked at his friend with admiration.

"You're an astonishing fellow, Nap," he observed. "To think that I knew you as an obscure don!"

"If you're in the Transport Service, you have to use your brains, not merely turn a handle. Prepare to load luggage by numbers; here's Osborne."

Four taxis drove into the station, and Osborne jumped out of the first.

"I had the devil of a hunt for it," he exclaimed between yawns. "Here, Kitten, no slinkin' off! You come and do some honest work!"

Markham put a finger to his lips and nodded in the direction of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Canteen. A girl stood at the entrance buttoning her fur coat and putting on her gloves.

"She's frightfully lovely!" he whispered excitedly.

"Load luggage!" Fenwick rejoined. "On the word 'One' . . ."

But Markham was paying no attention to the word "One." Lighting a cigarette, he sauntered a few steps down the platform in the direction of the canteen. The girl waved her muff to the line of taxis and walked to the kerb. Without turning round or catching sight of Markham she stepped inside, pausing for a moment to say in a clear, assured voice, " Semiramis Hotel, please."

Markham stood rooted to the platform until the taxi had disappeared from sight; then he sighed and walked back to his companions.

" She *was*—frightfully—lovely," he told them.

" If you'd concentrate on getting the luggage on board," said Fenwick hotly, " instead of running after women you'll never see again . . ."

" I *shall*, Nap," Markham answered, his brown eyes shining with excitement. " Her name is Bluebell—I mean, with eyes that colour she couldn't be called anything else; she's staying at the Semiramis . . ."

" How d'you know ? " asked Osborne, with lazy interest. Anyone who imported so much enthusiasm into his amours was a new and arresting phenomenon.

" She's just gone there, fathead ! " answered Markham.

The luggage was still lying on the platform, and, as Osborne and Markham seemed equally forgetful of the evening's carefully arranged programme, Fenwick had to compromise with his dignity and himself stoop to manual labour.

" You'll never see her again," he repeated, by way of reprisal. " Not every one who goes to the

Semiramis is staying there. She may be going there for dinner . . ."

Markham pondered this suggestion for a moment; then he walked slowly away.

" Again," continued Fenwick, with the old lecture-room manner, " she may be a chamber-maid on her afternoon out. . . . Kitten, where are you off to? That's the wrong taxi."

Markham opened the door of the second cab on the line and waved his hand to Fenwick.

" Bet you a pony I meet her to-night," he called back, with his foot on the step.

" You idiot, you'll be late for dinner ! " shouted Fenwick. " It's nearly six now."

Markham slammed the door and picked up the speaking-tube.

" Semiramis Hotel," he said.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVIL FINDS WORK

THE taxi slid rapidly down Grosvenor Place and turned into Piccadilly. The great white block of the Semiramis at the corner of Greenfield Street was looming in sight, when the Kitten, bending forward to read the meter, observed in the mirror the reflection of a grimy face.

" Friend of my youth ! " he called down the speaking-tube.

The driver clapped on the brake, side-slipped under the lamps of a W.D. lorry, and came to a standstill with his front wheels half-way up the steps of the St. James' Club.

" What was that you said, sir ? " he inquired.

" It can't be done, cabby," the Kitten answered, mournfully shaking his head. " My uncle George would never forgive me if I went into the Semiramis like this. Besides, I haven't baited the hook yet. Take me into your confidence, cabby ; advise me, and add a modest six and eightpence to your fare. Where can I get what the vulgar call ' reach-me-downs ' ? "

The cabman scratched his head and looked closely at his fare. He had the best reason for knowing that nearly four hours had passed since alcohol could last be obtained on licensed premises.

" Clothes ? " the Kitten persisted. " I want a full rig-out complete with gent's spattings and a bowler hat. Take your time; I'll charter you by the hour if you think you'd make more money that way."

He lay back so negligently in his corner that the driver felt it would be useless to appeal to his better feelings.

" Clo's ? " he repeated, and drew a spotted cotton handkerchief from his side pocket. " I d'no nothing 'bout clo's."

The Kitten leaned forward persuasively.

" Suppose I were your little boy," he suggested, " and you were taking me back to my Select Commercial Academy for the Sons of Gentlemen. Where would you fit me out ? " He paused. " You must have driven scores of unprepossessing mothers on a like quest. I don't believe you're trying."

The cabman sniffed and drew his right hand from wrist to index finger nail along the under side of his nose.

" There's Appleby and Pearson's," he pronounced.

" Reach-me-down is written in every letter of their name," exclaimed the Kitten. " Where do they ply their industrious needles ? "

"Ny Oxford Street, 'ard by Tonnumc'troad," was the reply.

"To their Emporium!" directed the Kitten, waving his hand. "Get there in fifteen minutes, and I'll give you a bob for yourself. Get there in ten, and I'll show you the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum."

Thirteen minutes later the taxi drew up opposite a large and flashy clothier's establishment. Behind the big plate-glass windows phthisical waxen boys with curly hair and made-up ties displayed the progressive symptoms of drop-wrist; round-faced dry-goods merchants stood with gleaming guns pressed against the leather pads of their shooting-jackets; and impossible golfers in Donegal tweed pantaloons watched the effect of improbable shots. Here and there a conscientious but still consumptive cyclist stood, in knickerbockers and Guards tie, with one foot on the pedal of his machine, and the sons of a race of Vikings divided their attention between canoe paddles and the Leander ribbons on their hats.

"My God!" observed the Kitten, and after that there seemed nothing to add.

"Will this do for yer, sir?" asked the driver, with a self-satisfied leer.

"In all probability," answered the Kitten faintly. "I say, you must come in with me, you know. Say you're my uncle George."

The cabman, recollecting that lunatics and drunken men usually pay well, had up to this time affected to enter into the spirit of the expedition. He drew the line, however, at abandoning his taxi, and the Kitten was left to deal single-handed with the revolving glass door. As he persisted in leaning centripetally against the pivotal column, it required time and two shopwalkers to detach and lead him into the shop.

"Well, what about it?" he began conversationally, pulling a stool up to the counter and beating out a music-hall song with the head of his cane.

The senior shopwalker bowed and pretended to wash his hands.

"What may we have the pleasure of showing you, sir?" he inquired.

"What have you got?" the Kitten retaliated. "I want something that's ready. None of your 'From the Grill, Twenty Minutes.' Put the thing in a nutshell, I want to buy a gold wrist-watch."

The shopwalker, gloriously dowered with an abnormally large Adam's apple, loosened his collar to give it play.

"This is a gentleman's outfitters', sir," he said clearly and in evident pain.

"In sub-tropical countries a gold wrist-watch is reckoned an adequate outfit," the Kitten returned. "On the Equator, of course, it is excessive. When my uncle George and I were out in Bogota . . . But I am afraid you have misunderstood me. I would no more think of buying jewellery here than of ordering ready-made clothes at Tiffany's. I can't go into a goldsmith's in this kit, though, so I want you to fit me out from the 'altogether.'"

The shopwalker saw light, as an Evangelical gets salvation.

"A gent's winter suiting," he hazarded, moving away with flat-footed, uneven steps. "Town or country, sir?"

The suits that he had to show were equally ill-adapted for either, but the words were part of a ritual acquired as an apprentice forty-seven years before, when the world was young and wore side-whiskers, and the beauties of Dollis Hill blushed at his approach.

"To you," answered the Kitten carelessly, prodding a lay figure with his cane. "I want the sort of thing that I can wear for buying a gold wrist-watch. Surely that's simple enough? 'The grand Tissue of all Tissues, the only real Tissue, quite overlooked by Science—the vestural Tissue, namely, of woollen or other cloth.' Carlyle, 'Sartor Resartus,'" he added reassuringly, as the shopwalker glanced haggardly from his customer to a door marked "Private Office."

"This is a natty suiting, sir," he suggested, as though fearful of contradiction, mournfully wheeling forward a faceless lay figure clad in blue serge.

"Devilish like my colonel!" exclaimed the Kitten, involuntarily saluting. "The same far-away look in the eyes. What's the damage? Three guineas? I'll toss you double or quits. No takers? I suppose that includes the colonel? No? I call that rather dear."

He tilted his nose contemptuously, and the shopwalker's voice grew tearful.

"It's a natty suiting, sir. You'll find it'll wear well."

The Kitten turned upon him hotly.

"I've only got four days' leave!" he exclaimed. "In four hours I hope it will be nothing but a hideous memory. Oh, it's not your fault; you didn't make the ghastly suit. I'm not blaming you. Now show me all the trimmings—shirts and collars and boots and ties; let me live up to my suiting, let me be—what was your desolating word?—let me be natty at all costs."

Nine minutes later an appreciably older salesman staggered flat-footedly across the pavement under a load of parcels. The taxi-man raised his eyebrows sympathetically.

"Shell-shock," muttered the shopwalker. "My sister's boy he went just like that."

The Kitten, still in breezy, conversational vein, addressed himself without delay to the driver.

"Now, touching a bath and shave?" he inquired. "There would be a riot if I donned my natty suiting in mid-Oxford Street."

"Yer mean er hotel?" suggested the driver.

"Out of the question," answered the Kitten.

"I can't enter a decent place in this filth, and my uncle George wouldn't like my going to a Temperance or Commercial. Guess again."

The driver removed his cap, revealing a moist, scarlet forehead, which he mopped vigorously with the pale-spotted handkerchief.

"If I was you, sir, I'd go to the Omnibus Club."

"The place in St. James' Square? I'm not a member."

The driver clapped his hand to his side in noiseless mirth.

"Lor' bless you, sir! I'll make it all right for you. 'Alf the gentlemen as goes there ain't members."

"You don't think they'll loot my natty suiting?" the Kitten inquired anxiously, one foot on the step. "The Omnibus let it be, then. But you'll wait for me while I change, won't you? I feel as if I'd known you for hours."

From six-thirty to seven the Kitten was hidden in the depths of a strange club. Outside, in becoming proximity to the London Library, the taxi-man dozed over the "Evening News," while his meter with punctual and vigilant accuracy recorded the fact that six twopences make one shilling.

"Study for an allegory of Procrastination," cried the Kitten, bounding in mufti down the steps and flinging an ill-tied parcel through the window. "I say, when we've parted for ever, you might shy this in at 423B St. James' Street. Inquire for Captain Osborne's flat and say it's cream from his aunt in Devonshire. Now I want to go to the International Goldsmiths', and if it's shut when you get there try the effect of a frontal attack on the window, like you did in Piccadilly."

The shop was still open by the time that the taxi had threaded its way into Regent Street, and the Kitten sprang out and walked with confident familiarity to a counter at the back. A pale, grave man with a Newgate fringe and spectacles tidied away a litter of cardboard boxes and cotton-wool, and came forward with a bow.

"I'm glad to see you back, Mr. Markham," he said. "One of the usual, I suppose?"

The Kitten nodded.

"Have you got one with B. B. on it?" he asked. "If not, I'll have a plain one."

The shopman turned over a drawer of wrist-watches.

"We can engrave one, if you'll wait, sir," he promised.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. More likely than not they aren't her initials. The plain ones are six guineas, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir. Or, if you care to have this one with R. R. on, I can let you have it for five ten. It *looks* like B. B., and if you don't know the lady's name . . ." He coughed deferentially, as one who has spoken with unbecoming freedom. "The order was countermanded."

"I suppose the other fellow didn't know, either. Yes, I'll take this. After all, what's in an initial? I suppose I'd better pay; you never know when I may be killed. Trade good?"

The shopman shook his head.

"Only so-so."

"You should go in for the taxi business," counselled the Kitten. "I owe the man outside about three pounds. However, he's got a natty uniform for security. Good night."

The big ormolu clock at the entrance of the Semiramis was softly chiming seven-thirty when the Kitten finally paid off his driver and entered the lounge. For a man not to know the Semiramis is to argue himself unknown. Late-coming New Zealanders, precariously perched on a broken arch of London Bridge, will never, owing to the difference of levels, be able to see its ruins, but they may compare it learnedly with Acropolis, Forum and Rialto as a once bustling scene where the elect of an empire's capital gathered for refreshment and intellectual intercourse. Princes and Potentates have engaged one or other of the royal suites, Semites have assembled in impatient expectation of the New Jerusalem. Moving softly through the warm, scented lounge came every one with a new thing to wear or tell. Society journalists pencilled nightly lists of the diners, and musical comedy actresses melted and smiled until their names had been added, and their clothes described

Nap Fenwick, in wiring to engage a table, had acted with resolute orthodoxy in choosing the only possible place. Their leave was short, London was large: by tacit agreement the Army went promptly to the Semiramis, to see who was about, and stayed to be seen until its leave's end. The Kitten, versed in the habits of the hotel, entered by the door in Piccadilly. That way led direct through the lounge to Restaurant and Grill Room. There was a spacious and sombre side entrance in Greenfield Street, relegated to the use of princes, ambassadors, oil kings, residents generally, and those who wished to come or go unobserved. The hall was always in a half-light and usually deserted save for the presence of rustling young blondes in black silk dresses who imparted an air of opulent but persistent mourning to the Reception Office.

For purposes of his own, the Kitten knew and had used that twilit entrance. This evening, however, he had no one to fear or avoid and could enter the lounge with head erect. The room was crowded to its utmost capacity, and it required ten minutes' ramble and a vigilant look out to assure him that the girl whom he was seeking was not there.

Walking to the wide steps that led from the north end of the lounge to the Restaurant, he took up his position beneath the orchestra's gallery. The girl was not in the Restaurant, which was still half empty. He thought of taking the head waiter into his confidence, but in the interval since his last leave that capable alien had been disowned by the Swiss Consulate-General and thrust into an internment camp. Nor could he glean information from other members of the staff. They would bring him cocktails, but at that their English ended; and, though they proclaimed themselves to be Italian, it was noticeable that conversation dried up when the Kitten, to whom Italian was a second native tongue, addressed them in their own language.

"I must just wait," he murmured to himself, strategically snapping up an arm-chair by the foot of the steps. "Not a soul here I know! Just my luck! Waiter, bring me some cocktail that I've never drunk before."

For twenty minutes he sat and gazed on the changing scene. There were officers innumerable, but they were chiefly men of the New Army, junior and unknown to himself. There were scores of slim, filmily clad girls, sinking at one moment into the depths of the green leather chairs and sofas, at another leaping up to utter shrill greetings to their squires. Party after party pressed through the revolving door, shed its coats and cloaks in the hall, and passed through the lounge into the Restaurant. After a quarter of an hour the Kitten was the oldest inhabitant.

"*Some* business they must be doing," said a voice at his side, and he turned to find a large, bearded man of five-and-forty sitting in the next chair. The man spoke with an American accent and seemed to be on the best possible terms with himself. For some minutes the Kitten had watched him laughing and chatting with one after another of the guests, whispering confidentially to some of the girls, and nodding easily to important-looking elderly men with red tabs and oak leaves.

The Kitten nodded and was casting about for some comment when his neighbour jumped up and hurried down the gangway towards a bent, white-haired man who had just come in and was peering uncertainly round him through double-lensed glasses.

"Who's that gentleman?" the Kitten asked the head waiter, inclining his head towards the door.

"The gentleman in the glasses? Lord Eynsham, sir. He always stops here when he's in town."

"No, I mean the man with him."

"That's Mr. Henley, sir. He's correspondent of one of the American papers; spends most of his time here, sir."

The Kitten looked at his watch and ordered another cocktail. It took time to prepare, as he and the barman alone in Europe knew how it should be mixed, and the barman, though anxious to oblige, disputed the academic propriety of serving it in a tumbler. It was but half finished when Nap Fenwick in evening dress and a bulging white waistcoat appeared in sight, sidling indignantly down the gangway, followed by Osborne and an officer in naval uniform.

There was no chance of escape, but in the side pocket of his ready-made coat the Kitten's hand closed resolutely over the gold wrist-watch.

CHAPTER III

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY

AS the Kitten's taxi gathered speed and shot into the darkness, Lionel Osborne turned inquiringly to his companion.

"You can trust him to spoil *any* arrangement!" exclaimed Nap Fenwick impatiently. "Now he'll go dangling after some woman or other until halfway through dinner, and then turn up and start eating soup just when we are smoking."

Whatever the Kitten's future misdeeds, there seemed little profit in forecasting or discussing them on a deserted station platform. Osborne finished piling the luggage inside the taxi, told the driver where to go, and jumped inside.

"The Kitten knows my address," he observed reassuringly. "It's a free country, and he can spend his leave how he likes. We needn't wait for him, what?"

Nap Fenwick addressed himself to the new conditions and lovingly laid his plans.

"It's quite simple," he exclaimed. In his elucidatory hands all complexities became simple. "The revue starts at nine fifteen; so, if he turns up before a quarter to eight, we'll wait. If he arrives any time between seven forty-five and eight fifteen, your man must let him in, and he can join us half-way through dinner. I'll leave a note explaining things. If he doesn't come in till after eight fifteen, he must dine as and where he can and join us at the Alhambra."

Osborne nodded assent with the lazy gratitude of a man who likes to have his thinking done for him. Fenwick straightened his glasses and looked out of the window. Through some defect of bone formation in the nose, his glasses habitually lolled at a jaunty and bibulous angle, utterly out of keeping with his purposeful high forehead and determined, slightly sneering mouth. Every one has his pose, and Fenwick affected sternness of mind, rapidity of decision, and a comprehensive grasp; Osborne aimed only at a polished correctness of life. He wore the right clothes, dined in the right places, chose the right wines, and knew the right people. Nothing surprised him, and, when pursued by one hippopotamus on the banks of the Zambezi and saved by the intervention of a second, he watched their locked death-struggle with no other comment than, "Uncertain-tempered beasts, what?"

His flat in St. James' Street was entirely correct. There were seductive arm-chairs for as many people as his library would hold; thick carpets and club fenders in every room; safe, recognizable pictures on the walls, and the Great Standard Unread in the book-cases. The windows would not only shut, but remain shut—a rare, but necessary refinement of personal comfort for a man who regarded a street as the fitting place for fresh air. A friend walking in on a wet afternoon would find time slipping away all unperceived in those warm, bright rooms, where a typewritten slip by the bell informed the visitor that one ring indicated a Bronx cocktail, two a dry Martini, and three a gin and vermouth. As every one knew, the cigars were on a table by the fireplace, the whisky and soda on every other.

A blazing fire awaited the two men, and, as the Kitten's absence relieved congestion in the bathroom, they settled down with their feet on the fender and drowsed over a pile of illustrated and evening papers.

"A bit better shootin' by that damned Hun," remarked Osborne, stirring to quicker combustion a number of unopened letters, "and we should be floatin' about in an uncommon cold sea. Is there anything in your rag about it?"

Nap Fenwick turned the pages of the "Night Watchman" and shook his head.

"'Great German attack at Ypres,'" he read out. "You just missed that. 'Driven off with huge losses.' 'Activity in the North Sea'—nothing about the Channel. 'The New Thrift Campaign.' 'Cementing the Alliance. . . .' Oh, I saw all about this in the train. There hasn't been time to get the news through yet."

Osborne sank lower into his chair and clasped his hands beneath his mop of red hair.

"What was the last stunt?" he inquired.

"'Cementing the Alliance?' Prince Christoforo of Catania's coming over; I rather want to meet him. He was up at Oxford with me, when they sent him over to learn English. I suppose he's come to divide up the Balkans."

"Just as well to get 'em first," suggested Osborne.

"You must have a *plan*," Fenwick answered. "The whole of our Balkan policy has been hashed up because we couldn't make out which horse to back." He jumped up and possessed himself of a war map, thumb-tacked against the wall. "If we could break north-west *here*—or *here*—or *here*, the war'd be over in a month. And the Germans know it. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to hear that they knew Christoforo was coming and tried to sink him. If he fixes up an agreement . . ."

"But what's there to fix up?" interrupted Osborne, whose geography embraced no country in which he could not shoot big game. "Italy's not a Balkan State, is she? Why's she buttin' in, what?"

Fenwick turned to him with the ill-disguised gratitude of a lecturer who for long silent months has been debarred from lecturing.

"You've only to look at the map," he began, without any idea, however, of letting it rest at that. "Servia's land-locked. When the war's over, she'll claim Bosnia and Herzegovina, Fiume and a strip of Hungary, Trieste and a strip of Austria. She'll want to divide the Adriatic; and Italy won't allow it. Italy doesn't love the Slavs. If Servia wants coast-line, Italy will insist on her getting it lower down—here, Albania, Macedonia. . . . It's either that or carving clean through Bulgaria to Dedeagatch. And we don't want that. Ever since we failed in the Dardanelles, our best hope of knocking Turkey out of the war is to pacify Bulgaria, leave her with her coast-line, lengthen it, perhaps, as far as Kavala. That means Greece has got to lose territory on one side and possibly on both; I'll stake my life that's what Italy proposes. I'm not sure that she isn't too late, though. This Greek rebellion looks as if Greece might come in on our side; then Italy'll have to give way about the Adriatic. It doesn't matter what you settle, so long as you settle something. The Germans know that, too. They know that, if we patch things up with Bulgaria and advance through Macedonia, they're done. That's enough to explain to-day's submarine."

Osborne looked at the clock, untwined his long legs, and rose to his feet.

"Ah well, very interestin'," he murmured, without conviction. "Oughtn't we to be dressing, though, what? You push along and have first go at the bath, while I scribble a line to the Kitten."

As Markham had failed to put in an appearance by ten minutes to eight, a sheet of paper with the words, " We have gone on to the Semiramis," was propped against the clock, and Osborne and his guest descended to St. James' Street. Unused to the darkened streets, they picked their way gingerly in the direction of Piccadilly and were turning under the arches of the Ritz when a figure in naval uniform started suddenly out of the shadows.

" Hullo, Lionel ! " he exclaimed, in surprise.

Osborne nodded unemotionally.

" Cheero, Tony," he said. " Introduce Captain Fenwick—Mr. Armitage. What you doin' here, Tony ? "

" My packet's put in for repairs," Armitage answered. " Are you on leave ? "

" No, we've deserted. Look here, why don't you run your show a bit better, what ? instead of lettin' great hulkin' submarines chase us half-way to America ? "

" Did you cross to-day ? " Armitage inquired, raising his eyebrows. " You're in luck, old thing. I've just been talking to a fellow in the Admiralty, and he told me all Channel sailings were stopped at midday."

" Our particular sailin' was nearly stopped rather before midday," said Osborne. " If you're doin' nothin' better, roll along and have some dinner. We've got a box for the Alhambra show."

" I always said you were a white man," was the answer, and the three fell into step and proceeded down Piccadilly to the Semiramis.

Antony Hugh Norten Armitage, gunnery lieutenant on H.M.S. "Princess Elfrida," was shown by the lights of the hall to be a sturdily built man of middle height, in the late twenties. His face, square and dark, was imperturbably smiling; his eyes humorous and resourceful. Inside the Service and out, he had never been known to lose his temper, a characteristic which, having regard to his wrists, neck, and shoulders, must have contributed not only to the comfort but to the safety of his brother officers.

"I simply don't know what I should have done, if I hadn't met you fellows," he remarked to Osborne, as he smoothed his glossy dark hair before a mirror.

"You have to thank a certain Kit Markham," Fenwick explained. "He *was* to have dined with us, but a strange woman appeared in sight . . ."

Armitage nodded with understanding.

"Youth! Youth!" he murmured tolerantly.

"It's a morbid craving," Fenwick interposed. "When we landed to-day, he rushed off to invite one girl to lunch here to-morrow; *I* found him fluttering the affections of the telegraph clerk, and now there's this third. He's got no power of concentration."

"It's good practice," Armitage suggested. "And he can't marry them all."

"It would serve him right if he could," Fenwick rejoined vindictively. "Are you ready?"

He was leading the way into the lounge when

Osborne caught his arm with one hand and with the other pointed across to the steps by the orchestra.

"He's here the whole time!" he said.

"He hasn't found her," Fenwick answered, with spiteful relish. "You remember I said he'd never see her again?"

Armitage began to feel that his invitation had been made prematurely.

"I say, look here, Lionel . . ." he started, but Fenwick waved a silencing hand.

"He can't dine with us in those clothes," he pointed out. "They wouldn't admit him to the Restaurant. I told him to put on a white waistcoat. I made all the arrangements—very carefully, and if he doesn't choose to follow them . . . He must order himself a chop in the Grill Room."

The lounge was half-empty by this time, and, as they crossed to the orchestra steps, the Kitten rose to his feet with a subdued cheer.

"I've found a new cocktail!" he exclaimed excitedly. "One of gin, two of dry orange curaçoa, the juice of half an orange . . ."

"I met that in Sumatra seven years ago," Armitage interrupted. "It's called 'King's Ransom.'"

There had been no time for an introduction, but none seemed needed. He and the Kitten took each other's measure in a rapid glance, and the Kitten held out his hand.

"Do they drink it in tumblers out there?" he inquired, with interest. "Ah! that makes all the difference! Here it's called 'Soul's Ruin.' A Melbourne man carried the secret to Gallipoli and handed it on with his dying breath to an unfrocked chaplain with the Yorks and Lancasters, who revealed it to the barman here when he was invalided home. The tumbler idea, the touch of genius that marks the artist, *I* contributed. Uncle George must be told about this." He flourished the glass and set it down. "Have several?"

A glance at Armitage suggested to Fenwick that the situation was slipping out of his control; the Kitten, bright-eyed and voluble, was the last man to recapture it.

"About dinner . . ." he began, as Osborne raised four fingers and nodded to a passing waiter.

"It'll be one of your usual dinners, Lionel?" inquired Armitage. "We'd better pool addresses in case the night air's too much for us. All you men are staying together? That makes it much simpler. I'm at 747 Jermyn Street. Now, then, dinner? We just walk in."

The cocktails had arrived, and he drained his with a practised and efficient despatch.

"Yes, but the Kitten will have to go to the Grill Room." Nap Fenwick straightened his rakish glasses and surveyed the ready-made suit with almost audible disfavour.

"You can't split the party," Armitage objected.

" He won't be admitted in those ghastly clothes."

" They're *not* ghastly clothes," the Kitten interrupted indignantly. " They're a gent's natty suiting."

" They're the sort of clothes," Fenwick persisted with cold scorn, " that married vicars wear in Scandinavia when they elope with Sunday-school teachers."

" Two fellows at my taximan's club tried to loot them," said the Kitten proudly.

" In a decent club clothes like that would report themselves to the Committee. You can take it from me, Kitten, you won't be admitted if you're not in evening dress."

The Kitten shrugged his shoulders complacently and dropped into a chair.

" Back talk apart, I don't much want to be. I'm waiting for a frightfully lovely girl," he confided to Armitage.

" You can do that any time," Armitage answered, " but in another hour and a half you won't be able to get anything to drink."

" And this is the country I've bled for," murmured the Kitten. " Why don't you all come to the Grill Room ? "

Fenwick showed signs of growing impatience.

" Because I've ordered dinner in the Restaurant," he said.

" Push along and eat it, then. . . . I'll stay here. I'm warm and happy."

Armitage, recognizing a kindred spirit, tried his powers of mediation.

" You can't possibly dine off 'Soul's Ruin,' " he pointed out.

" Not if you take it in a tumbler ? "

" What he wants is a nice, juicy chop, what ? " said Osborne paternally.

" I *don't* want a nice, juicy chop. Either I stay here, feeding on romance . . ."

" And drinking rot-gut cocktails," interposed Fenwick.

" Or else I come and dine in the Restaurant with you."

The Kitten was still strictly sober, but had reached a difficult condition of cheerful defiance. Osborne leant down and rested a hand on his shoulder.

" You—won't — be — admitted — in — mornin'—dress," he said, with persuasively clear articulation.

" Say I'm a distinguished foreigner ! "

Fenwick looked him up and down.

" I've never seen anyone less distinguished."

" You don't know a natty suiting when you see one," the Kitten rejoined. " If you give me out to be the Grand Duke Popoffski . . ."

Fenwick's hand rose to his chin, and he stroked his cheek thoughtfully. The impatient lines had faded from his brow, and his eyes were wide and eager.

" D'you speak Italian, Kitten ? " he asked.

" Never spoke anything else for the first twelve years of my life. When the guv'nor was at the Embassy in Rome . . ."

Fenwick cut short the flood of reminiscence with a sweeping gesture.

"It's perfectly simple," he explained to Osborne and Armitage, one lecturing hand upraised. "Prince Christoforo of Catania, who has not had time to dress . . ."

Osborne's sense of propriety was visibly shocked.

"Oh, I say, no, you know," he objected. "I'm known here."

"The Prince isn't," Fenwick answered. "You can be seen dining with a prince, can't you?"

"But if the real man turns up, what?" asked Osborne, weakly yielding ground.

Fenwick turned swiftly to Armitage.

"You said all Channel sailings were cancelled? He can't be here to-night."

"And what happens when some lad shouts out, 'Cheero, Kitten!'?" inquired the embryonic prince.

"Don't pay any attention!" cried Fenwick, shifting from one foot to the other in his excitement. "The Prince wishes to preserve his incognito; that's simple enough, isn't it? Are you equal to it, Kitten?"

"A little natural dignity, a natty suiting . . ."

"You've just got to follow the head waiter, sit down, and behave yourself. We shall stand till you give us leave to be seated."

There was an interval of indecision. Armitage had already accepted the position with wonted adaptability, but the correct soul of Osborne was outraged. Three times he embarked on objections, only to flounder and grow silent in mid-sentence.

" We can't carry it off," he ended up lamely.

" If the Kitten will behave . . ."

" Another ' Soul's Ruin,' and you may tell the head waiter I'm God Almighty's elder brother," volunteered the Kitten.

" Not another drop ! " said Fenwick.

" But what's the good of being a prince if I'm to be deliberately starved ? "

" For one night only."

" Oh, have it your own way ! " He rose and peered into the crowded Restaurant. " I don't know what uncle George would think. . . . Gentlemen, if you are ready . . ."

A few paces in front, Fenwick led the way out of the deserted lounge and up the steps to the Restaurant door.

" My name is Fenwick," he told the head waiter. " I ordered a table for three."

The head waiter bowed and pointed across the room.

" By the middle window, sir."

" We shall want another chair." He glanced carelessly over the rows of little tables. " I suppose you haven't anything more—secluded ? "

The head waiter threw up his hands with a gesture of apology.

"Every table engaged, sir."

Fenwick nodded tolerantly.

"It can't be helped," he said. "The Prince has not had time to dress, though."

He was turning towards the middle window, but the obsequious head waiter became of a sudden more obsequious.

"The Prince, sir?"

"Prince Christoforo of Catania," answered Fenwick over his shoulder. "He has stayed here before? No?"

CHAPTER IV

A CROWDED HOUR

THE entry was far less formidable than any of the four men anticipated.

Following easily in the wake of the bowing head waiter, the Kitten threaded his way among the little tables with their pink shaded lights, reached the recess under the middle window, and sat down with his face to the blazing white and gold room. The distance covered was short, and the other diners were preoccupied with the satisfaction of their own gross appetites. The hum of high-voiced conversation was uninterrupted; hardly a glance was bestowed on the man who, first of men, entered the Semiramis dining-room at ten minutes past eight in morning dress.

The distinguished foreigner gazed with interest round the room. Solemn, powdered waiters in mulberry coats and black knee-breeches hurried noiselessly to and fro, appeared at unexpected elbows, and interrupted scandalous confidences by proffering uncut birds to uninterested clients; a butler with massive civic chain and the blotched face of an elderly Dionysus paraded the authenticity of his labels and corks, and a sad-eyed exile, Turkish before the war, but now a naturalized Algerian, wandered disconsolately between the tables in red pantaloons, short jacket and fez, wheeling a three-decker wagon with coffee, cigars, and unconventional liqueurs. The band, failing to drown the persistent voices, quickened to the coda of a rag-time, and the more modish of the women raised and lowered their whitened shoulders, jerking their heads from side to side in time with the syncopated rhythm.

"Vi prego signori, si accomodino!"[1] exclaimed the Kitten, affecting to notice for the first time that his companions were still standing.

The three aides-de-camp bowed and took their places.

"Che scena magnifica!"[2] he murmured to Nap Fenwick.

"Not at all," was the positive answer; then, feeling that all was not well with his reply, "The menu, sir."

The Kitten studied the card attentively.

"Che pranzo squisito!"[3] he exclaimed rapturously.

"Well, you chose it, old thing," muttered Osborne, recollecting a heated discussion on the boat, as they crossed. Then, aloud, "You are too kind, sir."

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[1] Gentlemen, pray be seated.

[2] A charming scene.

[3] An admirable dinner.

The head waiter, who had set himself to attend the august table in person, withdrew and returned a moment later with the wine list.

"May I suggest a little of the 1904 Bollinger, sir?" asked Fenwick.

"We believe it to be a tolerable wine," the Kitten answered, lolling back and negligently producing his cigarette-case.

In greater or less degree the excitement of their entry and consciousness of their false position had gone to all their heads. Even Nap Fenwick forgot to be purposeful and gave rein to his sense of artistry, while Armitage, silent but smiling, gazed round the room, maturing devilry. Osborne, the most conventional, was the least affected. Three or four of his wide-reaching acquaintance were in the room; one had already bowed to him.

"I say, Kitten," he whispered tensely, "no smokin' here till after eight thirty, you know."

The Kitten lit his cigarette and allowed Armitage to relieve him of the match.

"What d'you bet?" he demanded. "Lex non obstat principi, or words to that effect. We did that stunt dam' well, and now we're going to enjoy ourselves. We'll confide to our discreet aides-de-camp that we're devilish hungry and leave them to do the needful, only pointing out that a property roll and anti-fat toast don't constitute a meal for a gentleman. Our princely memory retains some chat about a bisque. And there's no harm in

Osborne's reminding Simon the Cellarman that we have a royal thirst. As for Armitage——" Reflectively he blew a smoke ring and considered means of profiting by his position. "Armitage might fraternize with the uninterned alien in nominal control of the orchestra and request him—only a request, mind, not a command; otherwise he'll bring a barrel organ and play the filthy thing outside the flat on the grounds that I've given him a royal warrant, whatever that is—request him to play 'Irish Eyes,' hint to him that we have a soul for music and habitually pick that out with one finger in the southern fastnesses of Catania."

Armitage sighed in unaffected distress.

"I say, anything but that, Kitten!" he begged. "That and a farmyard imitation are the only two unbroken records for our gramophone on board. We've had the damned thing hourly since we took up war stations."

The Kitten smiled to himself.

"Bluebell is Irish," he murmured. "The frightfully lovely girl I told you about, you know. I could tell it by her voice."

"Let it rest at that," Armitage suggested.

The Kitten raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"We were under the impression that we had expressed a desire," he said.

The two men eyed each other steadily.

"I should not like to have to ask the head waiter to find you another table," the Kitten went on.

Armitage rose to his feet with a smile. Every one on board the " Princess Elfrida " knew that smile and was accustomed to prepare for violent emergencies on its appearance. Osborne, too, knew it, but he had departed in search of the wine waiter and could offer no warning.

" Sir, I go," said Armitage.

The Kitten, left to himself, smiled in childish triumph. It amused him to feel that, as long as the farce continued, he could issue orders broadcast and get them obeyed. In an hour " Prince Christoforo " would degenerate into Lieutenant Christopher Markham, very much at the mercy of his former equerries ; for an hour he could play Czar of all the Russias.

" You have laid me under an obligation," he said mischievously to his aides-de-camp when they returned. Nap Fenwick had visibly not enjoyed being told to fetch and carry, and Osborne, accosted by friends at three tables, had been compelled to explain elaborately that he was dining with a Personage who preferred to remain incognito. The discreet words and the head waiter's demeanour were kindling interest in several quarters ; and Osborne was for discouraging interest in his doings that night.

Armitage alone was smiling and self-possessed.

" There's one point of etiquette we might clear up," he suggested casually. " I don't know the drill for palace evolutions. What happens, Lionel, at a thing like a Windsor Garden Party, when the band plays 'God Save the King'? Do the other members of the Royal Family stand up?"

"As far as I remember, they do," said Osborne.

"No," said Fenwick. He had never been to Windsor, but, equally, he was never without an answer. "No, they don't."

Armitage bowed ironically.

"Thanks, thanks," he said. "You're always so helpful. Take another case, a prince—like the Kitten—who's not a member of the reigning house. You'd have to stand up, wouldn't you, Kitten?"

At that moment the Kitten was trying to attract the attention of a strange but arresting young woman three tables away.

"Eh? What's the row about?" he asked. "Yes, I suppose I should."

"You needn't be so damned offhand about it."

"Sorry, sorry! I was busy."

"Oh, don't apologize!" Armitage answered, glancing round at the orchestra. "There *was* a reason for the question, though. I've told the conductor to play the Italian National Anthem, and you've got about three seconds to decide what the drill is."

Osborne's lank figure of a sudden jerked itself upright.

"You *fool*, Tony!" he exclaimed.

Armitage only smiled. Over the hum of voices came the tap of a baton, followed by the slow opening bars of the Italian National Anthem. Nap Fenwick sprang to his feet.

"Get up, everybody!" he whispered. "Kitten, don't take any risks!"

There was a moment's hesitation; the Kitten put his hands on the edge of the table, then let them fall in his lap. Every one, he felt, had the right to stand up; it was considerably more distinguished to remain seated. He glanced at his companions and bowed graciously. All eyes were directed to his table, and, at sight of the three men standing rigidly to attention, first one and then another chair was pushed back. Before the anthem was a quarter played, not a man was left seated.

As the last chords died away, the Kitten turned to Nap Fenwick.

"And you were the man who found fault with my natty suiting," he said. "Now you're going to ask the conductor to come here."

Osborne attempted to intervene, but his royal guest was grown despotic. The man was presented, thanked, and sent away with Armitage's silver cigarette case as a memento.

"Now I think I'm square with every one," the Kitten remarked, with satisfaction. "We might get on with dinner. Cheer up, Osborne, you're too self-conscious. You should cultivate Nap's dramatic instinct."

"Dramatic instinct be damned!" Osborne returned, attacking his soup and glancing apprehensively round him between spoonfuls. "I'm known here, and you're not. You'd better stop rottin', Kitten. There's a fellow by the door who probably knows your illustrious namesake—the old boy in glasses. Luckily he's fairly blind, but he'd know me. I've been to dances at his house a dozen times."

"Who is he?" Nap Fenwick inquired.

"Old Lord Eynsham."

The Kitten was suddenly sobered.

"Is he dining?" he asked. "I could have sworn he went out of the hotel before dinner. Otherwise . . . But I was only a kid of twelve at the time."

"At what time?" demanded Nap Fenwick, infected by the Kitten's undisguised discomfiture.

"When he was Ambassador in Rome," was the answer, "and the guv'nor was First Secretary."

For a time the royal party was considerably unnerved. Lord Eynsham stood by the door, talking to the wine waiter and glancing repeatedly in their direction. When he moved across the room, panic descended on the table under the middle window. Whatever the fears, however, they were groundless, for the old man turned at right angles half-way across and passed out of sight to his own table. His place at the door was taken by the American journalist, who had sat beside the Kitten in the lounge. He, too, exchanged a few words with the wine waiter and stared a trifle unceremoniously; being in morning dress, however, he did not venture into the room. There was altogether too much whispering and neck-craning for the uneasy consciences of the four men, and Osborne had to call up the head waiter and intimate to him that so much publicity was unwelcome to the Prince, with a rider that the next visit would be spent at Claridge's if there were further cause for complaint.

"You were a blazing idiot to start this thing, Nap," he said severely. "I told you we couldn't carry it through."

Fenwick, the organizer, was stung to his professional quick.

"There's not been a single hitch," he declared.

"Wait till we're out of the wood, what?" was the gloomy answer, "before you start boastin'."

"But there *can't* be a hitch. Our position is legally unassailable, we've committed no crime, it's not an indictable offence to say you're a prince. . . ."

"People would be frightfully sick if they found out," Osborne interrupted.

Fenwick assumed a head voice and the Senior Common Room manner.

"To make people frightfully sick is not, so far as I am aware, an indictable offence," he said.

"No, but we should look pretty fair fools. That's not illegal, I dare say, but it means we should none of us ever be able to come here again."

"We're not likely to, in any event," Nap Fenwick rejoined grimly. "The war's barely been going on two years. In the meantime, as we're on leave, I see no reason why we should all be depressed. Either the Kitten is the prince, or he is not. . . ."

"Dichotomy," interrupted the Kitten. "See 'Jevons' Elementary Logic.'"

"If he is," pursued Fenwick, "it wouldn't be etiquette for Eynsham to interrupt a private dinner to claim acquaintance. If he isn't, Eynsham's the only man who can give him away, and he's apparently three parts blind, with nothing to gain by making a scene. Besides, we've no reason to think he even suspects. There's not a flaw in the arrangements; we set out to smuggle the Kitten in here, we've done it, we've given him dinner, and now all we've got to do is to get a cup of coffee. . . ."

He stopped as the Kitten laid a hand on his wrist. A tall, red-faced man with white hair and moustache was standing by the door bending down to speak to some one almost hidden from view. He wore a general's uniform, and his appearance suggested a man who breakfasted irritably off curried chicken and Captain White's pickles, wrote apoplectic letters to the "Times" during the morning, and spent his afternoons on the boards of non-dividend-paying companies floated to sell noiseless door-fasteners and patent fire-extinguishers. At a guess, he had been dug out of half-pay retirement and established at the War Office to secure that, if cavalry had to be sent abroad, the men should go by one boat, their horses by a second, and their equipment by a third, and that the three boats should not arrive simultaneously.

"Some one you know?" Nap Fenwick inquired in a whisper. For all the unassailable legality of his position, there was anxiety in his voice.

"Not yet. I shall know him within an hour, though. Look who's with him."

Fenwick looked as he was bid. The general was coming towards their table, and by his side walked a girl of seventeen or eighteen. She was dressed in white, with a flounced skirt cut well away from the ankles, a scarf fine as a spider's web over her bare arms, and satin straps fastened with amethyst buckles over her slim shoulders. Her hair, parted boyishly at one side, was the colour of ripe corn, her eyes—as the Kitten had lost no time in observing—the deep shade of a bluebell. She walked easily, as though conscious of her own beauty, her parted lips smiling in very enjoyment of life; as she came to the table under the middle window, her eyes, carelessly glancing from side to side, found themselves looking into the brown eyes of the Kitten. They rested on his face for a moment; then she passed on, and he sighed like a man whose head is giddy with the scent of all the flowers of Paradise.

The spell was broken by Armitage's voice.

"I congratulate you," he said generously.

The Kitten turned almost fiercely on Fenwick.

"*You* told me I should never see her again!"

"Well, you won't," Fenwick answered cheerfully, consulting his watch and laying his napkin by his plate.

"I shall stay here . . ."

"Don't talk rot! You've had the luck not to be recognized, and the sooner we're all out of this the better. For what it's worth," he added, with a sniff, "you've had a second look at her. Perhaps you also saw her father. I don't know that it would be the popular thing for an English lieutenant to act as a foreign prince for the purpose of hoaxing a general on the Staff."

The Kitten craned his head eagerly forward, but the general and his daughter were out of sight. A feeling of anticlimax was in the air, and one after another rinsed his fingers, straightened his waistcoat, and prepared to rise.

"Well, if you fellows are going to a music-hall . . ." began the Kitten, with an air of detachment.

"You're coming too," said Nap Fenwick firmly.

"Not till I've spoken to her. My Lord! to sit listening to comic songs when there's a girl like that . . .! All right, Nap; I shan't pretend to be anything but my insignificant self. I shall tell her everything if necessary, but it won't be necessary; she wasn't in the room when that damned National Anthem was played" He looked round with dreamy, smiling eyes. "Well, let's have some coffee outside."

Nap Fenwick tapped the table menacingly.

"You're coming with us, my young friend."

The Kitten, frigidly regal, looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"I did not hear you, captain; perhaps you would rather I did not ask you to repeat your words. Perhaps, too, you did not hear me suggest that we should take coffee in the lounge. If you are ready, gentlemen . . ."

The three aides-de-camp thrust back their chairs and sprang to attention. When he chose to show it, the Kitten had a certain dignity, and his rebuke to Fenwick, administered with [illegible] brown eyes and a flush on his olive cheeks, was a pretty piece of acting. Behind the mummery there was a hint of temper, a suggestion that the excitement, the wine, and that moment's glimpse of the girl with the lustrous eyes had made him reckless. With head held high he walked quickly across the room and down the stairs into the lounge. One or two assiduous courtiers sprang to their feet as he passed, but the rest of the diners only had time to see that a table was occupied one moment and empty the next.

"And now, Nap, we could do with a cigar and a little brandy," he said amicably, [illegible] a corner with four spacious arm-chairs, and [illegible] reconciliation by his tone. "[illegible] in here till Osborne's finished paying the bill, and tell me whether you don't think I've got rather a good princely manner."

"The Crown Prince couldn't teach you anything about looting cigarette-cases," Armitage admitted.

"Dramatic instinct," said the Kitten, with a wave of the hand. "I was good—I was damned good. You others weren't bad either. Hullo! here's Osborne. Look here, don't you wait on my account. If I get away in time, I'll meet you at the Alhambra; if not, keep me a place for supper at Blanco's. And, if you don't see me there, put a syphon in my room, and don't call me till I ring. Gentlemen, you may leave the presence."

There was delay for a few moments in which Osborne, Fenwick, and Armitage swallowed their coffee and tried in turn to persuade him to accompany them. The Kitten smiled and waved them away.

"He'll muck it up," Fenwick prophesied, as they walked down the centre of the lounge. "Waiter, a taxi, please."

As they were putting on their coats, a young man approached and offered his card. Fenwick adjusted his glasses and read: "Mr. James Milbrook. 'The Daily Gazette.' 999 Fleet Street, E.C."

CHAPTER V

THE UNSLEEPING PRESS

NAP FENWICK looked from the card to its owner.

The young pressman was mild and cadaverous, an unsuccessful man palpably paid by results. His high forehead and weak, pale eyes, waterily distorted through strong-lensed, rimless pince-nez, suggested idealism and an intelligent interest in the Stage Society; his bloodless lips, sunk cheeks, and tight-drawn skin were so many tell-tale marks of secret vegetarianism.

"You wish to see me?" Fenwick asked superfluously.

"I understand you have been dining with Prince Christoforo, sir," said the young man, and, with frightened acceleration, as Fenwick frowned, "You must excuse me; you see, it is my business to know. I do the Society Notes for the paper; you've probably seen them—'Among those who dined at the Semiramis Hotel last night . . .' and so on. I—I wondered if the Prince had any message for the readers of the 'Daily Gazette.'"

Fenwick's soul became possessed of a lust for inflicting pain. He had all academic Oxford's loathing and contempt for the unscholarly press and, as one of the last mournful survivors of the philosophic Radicals, he had at his mother's knee learned hatred of the "Daily Gazette" and its readers. For a while his imagination rioted in devastating calumny; nothing, however, shorter than a Presidential Message to Congress could do justice to the opportunity. He played with the idea of damaging the paper's reputation by filling its columns with false information, but the possibility of an action and the prospect of weakening the unassailable legality of his position robbed the idea of its first charm.

"I am sure I may say that the Prince has *no* message," he answered at length, in the tone that Phil May's dandy may have assumed when pressed by a street hawker to buy groundsel for the birds.

The pressman sighed, with resignation rather than disappointment. Rebuffs had been his daily food since he applied for membership of the Authors' Society, threw up a safe thirty shillings a week as shipping clerk to a firm of carpet makers, and trod the lordly, lettered path of Milton and Hylas Stocking.

"I wonder if I might ask the names of yourself and your friends," he inquired, like Dives seeking crumbs from the table of Lazarus.

"You may ask," Fenwick answered, "but I'm not sure that the Prince cares about too much publicity being given to his visit. His mission, as you may guess, is confidential."

"I should publish nothing without his or your consent, sir."

Osborne strolled back from the door to announce that the taxi had arrived.

"Well, obviously I can tell you nothing yet," said Fenwick, turning away. "The Prince only arrived to-day."

The pressman followed him anxiously to the door.

"If you could give me a hint, sir, what his mission is? We know nothing about it in Fleet Street."

"No one *does*, except the Prince. And, I suppose, the Foreign Secretary. I'm quite serious, Mr. Milbrook. I don't know, the Prince hasn't told me, and it would be out of the question for me to ask. I may hazard a guess, of course, but Fleet Street is as capable of guessing as I am, and a great deal more experienced."

Mr. Milbrook bowed in acknowledgement of the doubtful compliment.

"I suppose it is something arising out of the Italian declaration of war on Germany?" he ventured.

"Guess again," interposed Osborne impatiently. "Try a treaty for the partition of the Balkans—Italy here, Servia here," he went on, mimicking Fenwick's lecture. "Greece in the way, no outlet for Servia. Use your imagination, man. . . . I say, Fenwick, we shall be late."

Nap Fenwick buttoned his coat hurriedly and held out his hand.

"It's too early for any statement, Mr. Milbrook," he said. "As soon as there's anything to say . . . By the way, it would be unpardonable to approach the Prince direct. You understand that?"

"It goes without saying," answered the pressman. "In case of a statement, is the Prince staying here?"

Osborne grasped Fenwick's arm and dragged him through the door.

"He's stayin' with me," he called back over his shoulder. "Lionel Osborne, 423B St. James' Street. You're lettin' the artistic temperament run away with you, Nap," he added.

"I only wanted to keep the fellow from pumping the Kitten," was the answer. "Jump inside!" He stood with one foot on the step and, as he leant towards the driver, caught sight of the young pressman at his elbow. "Foreign Office," he called out, "as quickly as you can."

Then he stumbled into the cab, slammed the door, and picked up the speaking-tube.

"Did I say the Foreign Office?" he inquired. "I meant the Alhambra. Dramatic instinct. . . . Yes, Al-ham-bra!"

Left to himself, Mr. Milbrook stood gazing for a moment at the vanishing tail-light of the taxi. He was not too old for day-dreams: even Fleet Street had not yet twitched off the last garment of Romance.

Sometimes, as he wandered through the Semiramis lounge, he would visualize the hotel in flames and himself bursting madly down the crumbling staircase, some helpless, fainting girl in one temporarily muscular arm and a childless Oil-King in the other. Sometimes, when swarthy financiers sat nose to nose over their chilling coffee or blandly gesticulated with upturned palm, he would dream of half-caught phrases, pieced together by himself and conveyed with modest assurance (and no thought of reward) to the Prime Minister, as Greenwood had carried to Disraeli the news of the Suez Canal shares' impending sale. So far he had failed to lift himself out of the lowest rut, and Fleet Street only knew him as the man who had reported that "among those dining at the Semiramis Hotel were Lady Streatham and Captain the Honourable George Clarice." The information had assisted Lord Streatham in bringing a cross petition.

"Well, sonny, any of your blamed aristocracy here to-night ?"

Milbrook reeled from his dream-world to find himself bareheaded on the pavement of Piccadilly, facing the genial well-fed figure of Henley, the American correspondent.

"Nothing much of *ours*," he answered significantly. "There's one very big fish, though. Excuse me, I must get back to the office."

Henley rolled an uncut cigar from side to side of his capacious mouth.

"You mean Christoforo?" he asked. "I had a word with him before dinner."

Milbrook's face fell.

"You *always* get in first," he complained.

"But there was no secret about it. Your own rag billed him this morning; every one knew he was coming."

"They didn't know what he was coming for."

"I don't suppose anyone knows that," said Henley, stroking his beard and watching the young man's face.

Milbrook looked down on to the pavement and made no answer.

"Guess he didn't tell *me* anything to make my toes open and shut," Henley pursued, with much candour. "I only passed the time of day with him. Reckon we all have our theories, you as well as another. . . ." There was still no answer. "Some of the tips I've given you haven't been so far wrong, have they?" he asked, with meaning.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you anything about the Prince's visit."

"You can't tell me much I don't know. When you were freezing on to his pals, did anyone mention the word 'Balkans'?"

"Oh, they were mentioned," said Milbrook, with a pitiful attempt to be offhand.

Henley nodded and struck a light for his cigar.

"And when did you first hear of it?" he asked. "To-night? Well, I guess a country gets the Press it 'eserves. See here, sonny; that news was cabled from Rome to New Nottingham, Ohio, six days since, my editor cabled it back to me within twenty-four hours, and I'd got the interview written up thirty minutes later—five days before I set eyes on the Prince, and with your everlasting censors working overtime to stop me. Now I'm only waiting to mail the pictures and see if the Prince has any personal impressions to give me. You've not enough hustle to you in England."

"You're an old hand," answered Milbrook, with mortified admiration.

"I'm an *enterprising* old hand. Now see here, the Prince is inside by himself, waiting to be interviewed—fairly asking for it. If you quit fooling round with his friends and talk to *him* for a piece . . ."

"But what's the use? He's only just arrived; the others are at the Foreign Office now, arranging for an appointment."

Henley digested the news in silence, as he led the way back into the hotel.

"You could have sounded the Prince for his impressions," he suggested vaguely. "It's something to get yourself known, you know."

"So that he can show you the door a bit quicker when next you call? As soon as there's anything to publish, I shall get it."

"Through your moth-eaten Press Bureau?"

"Direct from the Prince. I've got a promise from the man he's staying with . . ."

Henley slapped his friend heartily on the shoulder.

"You're cute," he admitted. "There's nothing much the matter with that, and you can say I said so. Have a cigar? Oh, I forgot, you don't smoke. Say, how long did it take you to find out he wasn't staying here?"

"The fellow told me without being asked."

"Ah, I had to go to the Reception Office. You're shaping none so badly, sonny. D'you know where he *is* staying, now?"

Milbrook winked and said nothing.

"Oh, just as you please," Henley laughed. "I don't give a hill of beans to know, because he'll tell me to-night when I interview him. It's a mistake to be too close with a story, though—'specially with a man who ain't any sort of rival. Now here's something for nothing. Guess you didn't know there was a submarine waiting for the Prince in the Channel? Hanging about ever since the forenoon to sink him. That looks as if the Germans didn't want him to get here, looks as if his blamed mission was a bit important."

Milbrook's eyes opened wide with interest.

"There was nothing about it at the office," he said. "I was there till seven."

"Oh, your stone-age office!" exclaimed Henley, with impatience. "You never do hear anything, and what you hear you don't print. Cut along and wake 'em up with your submarine story; there's no copyright, and I don't use stuff like that.

Unless . . ." he paused and stroked his beard, "unless you like to wait till old man Eynsham comes out. He was British Ambassador in Rome when your mammy was spanking you, and one or two pars on 'Ex-Ambassador's Views,' eh? You won't spoil my market. I saw him an hour ago."

Milbrook's face lit up eagerly.

"D'you think he'd let me? I've never spoken to him, you know."

"You get nothing in this world without asking, sonny, and mighty little without giving something in return."

The significance of the words was not lost on Milbrook.

"I say, I don't want not to play the game, you know," he explained apologetically. "He's staying with a man called Osborne at 423B St. James' Street. Don't . . ." he hesitated timidly, "don't take all the wind out of my sails, Mr. Henley."

"Couldn't if I wanted to, dear boy," was the genial answer. "Guess we take our pigs to different markets, and as long as I deliver the goods in New Nottingham, Ohio, you won't find me ratting on the pool. *I* shan't have to call, and you may put your shirt on that. When I've had a heart-to-heart talk with the Prince here . . ."

"Any copy you can't use . . ." Milbrook interrupted eagerly.

"I won't forget you, sonny. Now, if you're out for good advice, light out for your old office and pitch 'em the submarine yarn, and, if they think you're monkeying them, tell 'em—from me—to go to hell and ring up the Admiralty. Then come back, if it's not too late, and keep your eye skinned for Eynsham. I guess two scoops in one night would make even an English editor turn in his sleep."

The young man hurried into coat and hat and ran out of the hotel. Still rolling his cigar from side to side, Henley strolled into the lounge and seated himself diametrically opposite the orchestra gallery under which the Prince was smoking and glancing through an evening paper.

" Large Benedictine," he called out to a waiter. " Say, d'ye know if His Highness is waiting for anyone ? I want to talk to him for a piece."

" He is alone now, sir," said the waiter, looking across the lounge.

" Ah yes. But he's reading ; I don't want to disturb him."

The waiter retired, and Henley sat idly smoking and nodding to acquaintances. Suddenly he saw the Prince throw down his paper and move a few steps towards the entrance to the Restaurant ; at the same time a young girl dressed in white entered the lounge alone and stood on the steps looking for an unoccupied chair.

Henley rose and sauntered to the cloak-room, encountering his waiter by the way.

" Fill up on it yourself and book it to me," he said, jerking his thumb towards the Benedictine. " I guess the Prince is about fixed. I must come and see him another time."

He walked briskly down Piccadilly, colliding occasionally with wayfarers and assuring them earnestly that the fault lay with the "durned darkened streets," and with them alone. On reaching Swallow Street he turned north and entered Regent Street, where sight of the Alcazar Restaurant seemed to remind him of his lost Benedictine. The café on the ground floor was filled with the usual crowd of conscientious Bohemians in flowing ties and wide-brimmed hats, and the air was blue with smoke and heavy with the hundred scents of cooking. All the men looked like poets except the one poet present, who looked like a bookmaker; the women, for all that they sipped absinthe without a grimace, looked like the wives of chartered accountants; the waiters alone seemed at home, and this—in their eyes—absolved them from the duty of waiting. Every table was taken, but by the Glasshouse Street door a threadbare elderly man, unsuccessfully wrestling with a chess problem, retained a second chair for the accommodation of his hat.

"Guess you've had to wait some, Silas," remarked Henley, removing the hat and seating himself. "I couldn't call round before."

"No matter, no matter," chirruped the other. It needed an expert to judge his nationality from his speech. "I have been amusing myself in the old way, the old way."

"Well, it amuses you and don't harm me. 'Cept, of course, that it qualifies you for chief mourner and not a damned thing besides. Put 'em away, Silas, and do one of your polite conversation stunts."

The old man swept the pieces off the board, replaced them in their box, and methodically cleaned his spectacles with a faded red silk handkerchief. With his piping voice, white hair, and shrivelled skin, he was like a retired butler, long pensioned off and set to live in a speckless lodge, but occasionally recalled as caretaker and guide to the picture gallery when the family was not in residence.

"Say, what's your news, Silas, anyway?" asked Henley, when his Benedictine had been brought him.

The old man blinked and looked up at the grimy ceiling.

"No news," he answered, "no news."

"Well, I've got some for you, then. Would you be surprised to hear that a submarine has been nosing about the Channel to-day?"

"I'm never surprised, never surprised. Besides, you told me that yesterday."

"I didn't tell you certain-sure, 'cause I didn't know myself. Well, that's all."

It clearly was not all, and the old man looked interrogatively at his companion. Henley leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"Guess it wasn't there for its health," he went on. "And you can say I said so. It butted in just about the time Prince Christoforo was billed to cross. It didn't fix him, though."

The old man's dead eyes were still lack-lustre and expressionless.

"The Prince got over?" he inquired.

"Sure. I've seen him at the Semiramis. He's quite a boy—dark, with brown eyes and curly hair. He's staying with a friend called Osborne at 423B St. James'."

"Four two three," repeated the old man wanderingly, "four two three, with a friend."

"Yes." Henley pushed back his chair and put on his hat. "There are several of them, and they've gone off to the Foreign Office. I'm going to bed, Silas; I've got a big day to-morrow, but I'll make time to look in here for another of your heart-to-heart talks. Good night."

He walked into Glasshouse Street, hailed a taxi, and drove to an address in Warwick Square. The old man buttoned his coat with considerable deliberation, put on his hat, and shuffled through the café. He was evidently an habitué, for a number of the ostensible poets bade him good night; evidently, too, his surname was unknown, for all addressed him as "Mr. Silas."

Entering Regent Street, he walked slowly for a short distance towards Oxford Circus, then struck to the left down Vigo Street, and again to the left by Sackville Street into Piccadilly. Here he rested for a few moments, then trudged westward to the top of St. James' Street, down which he turned, glancing with a bird-like movement of the head at the numbers on the doors.

CHAPTER VI

AT ONE-AND-TWENTY

THE Semiramis orchestra was beginning to play a second encore, when the girl in the white dress appeared at the top of the steps. "If you were the only girl in the world and I were the only boy," she hummed to herself, as she came down into the lounge. The orchestra was unaffectedly bored with the song; it had been played once at luncheon, twice at tea, and now this was the fourth time since seven o'clock. Prince Christoforo, however, did not share their boredom; it was at his request that they were giving the encore.

Suddenly the Prince left his seat and approached the girl in white.

"If you're looking for a chair," he said, "there are four unoccupied ones over there."

The girl turned at sound of his voice, still gravely nodding time to the music.

"'If I were the only girl in the world . . .'"

"And I were the only boy," he answered, with a smile.

"I should like to dance, only I suppose people would stare."

"I've been offering you a chair for the last seven seconds, only you've paid no attention."

She attended now and looked her companion up and down, quickly but exhaustively. He seemed young and well made, with clean-cut features, animated brown eyes, and an attractive voice. He was, moreover, presentably dressed, and his black hair was neatly parted and brushed. His manner, too, was deferential but easy. Altogether, in the girl's judgement, there could be no harm in returning a civil answer to a civil question.

"I'm really waiting for father," she said, when he again pointed to the empty chairs. "Besides, you were sitting there, weren't you?"

"I'll go away if you insist."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I thought I'd wait to see where father wanted to sit. He can't endure a draught."

"But why stand to wait? If he keeps you as long as you've kept me . . ."

The girl looked at him in faint surprise; then her manner hardened, and the deep blue eyes lost their carelessly friendly expression.

"Please don't bother," she begged, beginning to move away.

He bowed, but showed no signs of accepting his dismissal.

"Forgive my troubling you, but I've waited several hours. May I ask if you dropped a watch-bracelet at Victoria to-night?"

"A watch-bracelet? I don't own one."

"Ah, then it couldn't have been yours."

He bowed again and returned to his seat. In a moment the girl was by his side.

"I say, I didn't mean to be rude," she began apologetically. "I couldn't think . . . It's most awfully kind of you to trouble. I . . . as a matter of fact . . ."

She hesitated and broke off, flushing slightly. With unruffled good-humour he produced a gold watch-bracelet from his pocket and offered it to her.

"I caught sight of you leaving Victoria," he explained. "It occurred to me . . ."

"But how ripping of you!" she exclaimed. "And you've been waiting here ever since?" She held out a small, blue-veined hand. "Be friends and forgive me for being rude."

"If you'll really be friends and talk to me," he stipulated.

With a smile that was better answer than many words she dropped into one of the big arm-chairs, letting fall the gauze veil and leaving her arms and shoulders bare. Her companion seated himself by her side and watched her slipping the bracelet on to her wrist.

"It's simply lovely," she said, "and brand new. Now, if I'd been dishonest . . ."

"The monogram's an obstacle," he interrupted.

"Oh, nobody ever reads a monogram. One can't, to begin with. What's this meant for?"

"What d'you want it to be meant for?"

She looked up and smiled before answering.

"P. K."

"*Now* tell me what P. K. stands for."

"Why?"

"It'll save me looking in the Visitors' Book. Besides, I hate calling people 'Er, I say.' And my initial's 'K' too. For all you know, it stands for the same thing."

"What does your K stand for?"

"Kitten. And yours?"

"What an absurd name! Kitten! No one ever gave you that as a name."

"Every one gives me that as a name," he answered, with dignity, "even you."

"I *didn't*! I was just saying it over to myself."

"Next time you'll say it over to me. Now it's your turn. A promise is a promise."

He settled comfortably into his chair, but she only looked at him with a mischievous smile in her blue eyes and lifted one amethyst buckle higher on to her shoulder.

"'If you were the only boy in the world, and I were the only girl,'" she hummed, "I didn't promise anything."

"It was a promise in the sight of God."

She looked at him with her head on one side.

"K stands for Kenny, or King, or Kelway, or Kallaghan, if you happen to spell it that way, or Kyrle, or Kavanagh . . ."

"Kavanagh?" he interrupted. "Thank you. And your other name's Patricia. I knew you were Irish the moment you said to your taxi-man, 'Will ye please dhrive me to the Samirramus Autell?' And obviously everybody calls you Pat."

"Not everybody, Mr. Kitten," she corrected him.

"Everybody who's known you any time."

"Five minutes isn't quite long enough."

"That depends whether I spend it with you or my dentist," he answered. "Anyway, I've known you since six o'clock. D'you go to that canteen every day?"

She nodded.

"Then I shall go to that canteen every day. Are you always there at the same time?"

She shook her head provokingly.

"If you were the only girl in the world," he said, "I think I should slap you. I'm leaving England at the end of the week; I've got a frightful lot to do first . . ."

"How old are you?" she interrupted.

"Twenty-one. How old are *you*?"

"Seventeen. If you were a girl, you'd know that girls of seventeen aren't expected to have strange young men hanging about for them in railway stations."

"But every romance starts at a railway station—and they all end at a church. I've knocked about the world a tremendous lot, and I speak with some knowledge."

"Of the churches?"

"No; that's why the romance ends there. I meant the railway stations—Victoria above all. If I were the only man in the world . . ."

"But you're not. My father always fetches me away when I'm on late duty, and he'd have something to say if he found out . . ."

"Fathers should be deceived and not heard," answered the Kitten, with an impatient wave of the hand. "It must be frightfully unromantic, though, to serve in a canteen."

"I'm too busy to notice it. To-morrow night from nine till one . . ."

"One?" he repeated, making a note on his cuff. "'Nuff said. I shall be there."

"But, my dear Kitten . . ."

"I said you'd come to that in time."

"I told you my father always fetched me off late duty," she reminded him, blushing vividly at her slip of the tongue.

"You must give him a miss and slip out into the Buckingham Palace Road, where, with a start of surprise, you will find me waiting for you. Then when you meet at breakfast next morning—um, yes. This wants thinking out. I suppose he takes some handling in the morning?"

"He takes some handling most times," she answered, with a shake of her fair head. "Of course, *I* can do what I like with him."

"Then tell him not to come and fetch you to-morrow night."

"But it's just possible he may not care about my being brought home by a stranger at one o'clock in the morning."

"Introduce me, and I shan't be a stranger," suggested the Kitten promptly. "I may say I come of a most respectable family."

Pat Kavanagh looked past him to the doors of the Restaurant.

"He's coming now," she said. "Are you sure you really want to meet him? There are moments when I wouldn't introduce my worst enemy."

The Kitten turned his head, and in a moment the gaiety had died out of his face.

"I say!" he whispered, "I'm quite sure I don't want to meet the man he's with."

"Lord Eynsham? Why not?"

"He'll spoil everything."

"He's a dear!" the girl declared. "He's been awfully kind to me, and he's frightfully interesting about the war. I don't believe you know him."

"I only wish that were true."

General Kavanagh and his companion were finishing their conversation on the lounge steps. The Kitten half rose to go, but resumed his seat as Lord Eynsham turned down the gangway and the General came on alone.

"You really *had* better go," whispered the girl. "He's frightfully old-fashioned and wouldn't like to see me talking to strangers."

"But I'm not a stranger, Pat; and I want to meet you again."

She allowed the familiarity to pass unchecked.

"Well, you know my name," she said. "We shall be here till the end of the war."

"But I'm going abroad on Friday. If we don't meet before then, we may never meet again. Don't you want us to? We seemed to be such friends."

She looked up quickly, and for a moment her blue eyes gazed into his; then, still without speaking, she looked down again.

"It's a very simple question, Pat."

"You'll be too late," she whispered; and, as the words left her lips, General Kavanagh worked his way among the tables and sat down, deliberately tearing the band off a cigar.

Pat Kavanagh regarded him out of the corner of one eye to judge of his mood. Apparently his dinner had been to his liking. She telegraphed a question to the Kitten and turned to her father.

"Daddy, this gentleman has come all the way from Victoria and has been waiting here the whole evening with a watch-bracelet which he thought I might have lost. Isn't it sweet of him?"

"I hope you were properly grateful, Pat," said the General, with a pleasant hint of a brogue in his voice, bowing to the Kitten. "Was it yours? I suppose it was. Ye're the greatest sloven in the length and breadth of Ireland."

"You know it wasn't, daddy. You know I

haven't got one, and nobody loves me enough to give me one. But it was very kind of you all the same, Kitten."

The General sat upright in his chair, frowning until his brows met in a menacing line.

"Patricia!" he exclaimed, and on his excited lips the word became "Putrhissha!"

"Daddy, darling, it's the only name he's got. He comes of a very respectable family and he's leaving England on Friday, and I think you ought to ask him to lunch to-morrow."

Her father waved his hand down the lounge.

"Off with you to yer bed, Patricia!"

"But it's not *ten* yet!"

"It's long ago ye should have been in bed, if ye've no better breeding than that. Ye're not fit company for *any* man of respectable family." With another theatrical wave of the hand, he turned to the Kitten. "I apologize, sir, for my daughter's impertinence."

"I hope you won't send her to bed, sir," the Kitten answered, with his most effective smile.

The General pounded his knee with clenched fist.

"But she's intolerable, sir! She's incorrigible! She's a disgrace to her upbringing! I declare to you on my soul that I can do nothing with her! She disregards me. I might not be here. An Irish gentleman to hear his daughter insulting a stranger!"

He choked with his own vehemence.

"I assure you I did not look on it as an insult," said the Kitten.

Pat Kavanagh marked her applause by gently patting the table.

"Well done, Kitten!" she said. "Daddy, may I ask Mister Christopher—I suppose that is your name?—may I ask Mister Christopher to lunch with us to-morrow?"

"If ye think it'll gratify him to meet the daughter of the horse-leech. A quotation," he added quickly, but not quickly enough.

"I should like to come, sir."

The General shrugged his shoulders, resolved to make the invitation as unattractive as possible.

"Ye'll be between crabbed age and youth," he went on, with an air of resigned misgiving. "That mannerless slut on one side and old Lord Eynsham on the other. But if ye're not afraid . . ."

The Kitten avoided Pat Kavanagh's eye.

"I—I think I'm free, sir," he said uncertainly. "If I find out, when I get home . . . Perhaps I may send you round a note first thing in the morning?"

The girl looked at him reproachfully.

"You're backing out of it, Kitten," she said.

"I've got so little time in England," was the lame answer.

"Of course, if ye'd prefer dinner, now?" suggested the General.

The Kitten grasped at the opportunity.

"That would suit me much better."

"Then make it dinner. Here's Eynsham. We'll see if he can come to dinner instead."

The Kitten checked a sigh of despair and leaned fatalistically back in his chair, as Lord Eynsham shuffled up to them. Though tall, he was but the wreck of a man—bent and thin, of feeble movement, and so short-sighted that he could not distinguish faces at two yards' distance without double-lensed spectacles.

"Sit down with us, Eynsham," said the General, pointing to the empty chair. "My daughter has asked this gentleman . . ."

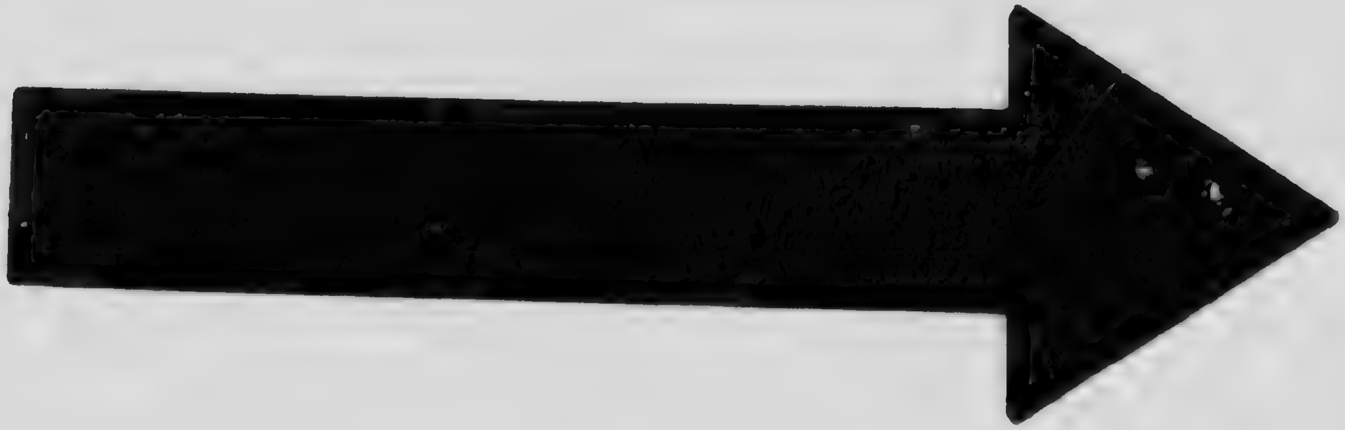
The Kitten rose and bowed, but Lord Eynsham remained aloof and outside the circle in an attitude of stiff formality. To the others there was nothing significant in his demeanour, and Pat Kavanagh fanned the conversation to life with hardly a moment's pause.

"He'd much prefer to be called Kitten, daddy," she interrupted.

A long quivering gasp broke from the old man. He glanced rapidly round the little circle, stared at her in amazement, and drew himself erect.

"Miss Kavanagh!" he exclaimed.

"It's no use being shocked, Lord Eynsham," she answered easily. "I'm a mannerless slut—daddy's just told me so—and you must take me as you find me. Now, if you just sit down comfortably . . ."



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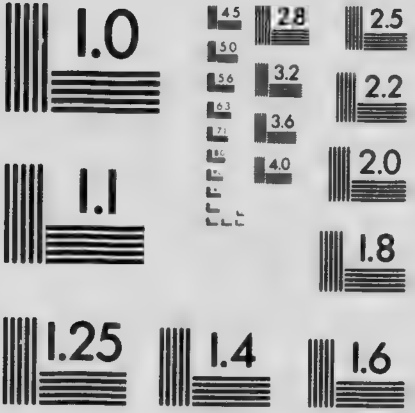

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The old man looked from her to the Kitten and back again.

"The Prince is not yet seated," he told her in an anguished undertone that seemed not far removed from tears.

She gazed tranquilly round the lounge. Every one seemed to be looking at her, but no one else was standing up.

"What Prince?" she demanded.

Lord Eynsham glanced interrogatively at the Kitten.

"Eccellenza lei non viaggia in incognito?"[1]

The Kitten hesitated and in that moment lost his nerve. To his disordered fancy a sudden hush had descended on the room; all eyes were centred on him, every ear was strained. To reveal his identity in that crowded, blazing lounge, besieged by the dream-face throng that an hour before had risen to its feet when his national anthem was played, lay beyond his powers.

"I suoi amabili concittadini non lo permettano," he explained. "Questa signorina ed io abbiamo avuto una conversazione molto piacevole. Loro Inglesi hanno un'etichetta molto comoda, pero' suppongo, che sarebbe meglio di presentarci scambievolmente?"[2]

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[1] "Your Highness is not travelling incognito?"

[2] "Your good countrymen would not allow it. This lady and I have been having a friendly talk. You English are so pleasantly informal. I suppose, however, that we ought to be introduced."

Lord Eynsham motioned agitatedly for the girl to rise.

"Then may I present Miss Kavanagh to you, sir?" he asked; and to the General, "Prince Christoforo was perhaps too young to remember it at the time . . ."

"I remember, my lord," interrupted the Kitten, "that, when your eyesight began to fail, the British Embassy in Rome lost a valued servant, and the kingdom of Italy a devoted friend. I beg that you will all be seated."

CHAPTER VII

AT SEVENTEEN

FOR many moments no one spoke. Lord Eynsham's diplomatic sensibilities were profoundly shocked by the ignorant familiarity of address adopted by General Kavanagh and his daughter to the Prince, and it is to be supposed that the General was even less dismayed by what had been said in his hearing than by what, knowing his daughter as he did, he imagined her to have said when there was no restraining influence at hand. His suspicions were in no way removed by her attitude on receiving the news. Sitting with flushed cheeks and downcast eyes, she fidgeted nervously with the end of her scarf, unable to speak or to look anyone in the face. Nothing that she had said was a hanging matter, but she felt that the Prince must despise her from the bottom of his heart. Looking back on their conversation, she seemed to appreciate for the first time a series of graceful hints, wrapped in a delicate irony, which she had been too obtuse or too incurious to penetrate.

"I told you that my parents were quite respectable, Miss Kavanagh," he said at length, and his good-humoured tone completed her discomfiture.

"We have been entertaining an angel unaware," said the General, in some embarrassment; "for anything that was said . . ."

"I wouldn't have a word unsaid, General," said the Kitten, with evident sincerity. As he had prophesied, Lord Eynsham's arrival had spoiled everything; the girl's hot cheeks and bitten lip proclaimed her humiliation; his one thought was to relieve the party of his embarrassing presence. In talking to Pat Kavanagh he had for a time forgotten his false position, but the formal presentation, his own pompous phrases (borrowed without acknowledgement from the romantic comedy stage), above all, the fancied nightmare hush that had descended on the lounge, brought painfully back to his mind the possibility that at any moment a brother officer might stroll in and accost him.

"If my daughter or I had known . . ." the General went on, in visible distress.

The girl looked up suddenly, and her blue eyes were filled with tears.

"I . . . I apologize, sir," she began formally; then turned almost hysterically to her father, "Daddy, I said the most awful things!"

The Kitten leaned forward and touched her knee with his hand.

"Dear Miss Kavanagh! It was my fault. If I'd wanted to be treated in any other way, it was my business to tell you so. As it happens, I didn't."

"I never dreamed you were anything but English," she answered, somewhat reassured, but still speaking with lowered eyes.

"Lord Eynsham will tell you that I've spent more of my life in England than in Italy."

The old man bowed in confirmation.

"An English school, I think, sir? Certainly an English university."

"And, if I had my way, I would live all my life in England. The merciless sun of Catania, the olive skins of the women, their dark eyes and black hair. . . . I am drawn by extremes, my lord. Blue eyes and fair hair are not among the many beauties of Italy." He sighed and, in brushing a flake of cigar-ash from his coat, managed to steal a glance at his watch. "Yes, if I were master of my own movements, I should never move from England, and, if I were master of my own time, I should not now be asking you to excuse me." He rose and stretched out his hand to General Kavanagh. "A short while ago, General, you took pity on a lonely stranger; does your invitation hold good for to-morrow's luncheon? I think after all that I should prefer that to dinner."

"I shall be honoured, sir. May I ask if there is anyone you would like invited?"

The Kitten laughed and shook his head.

'The larger the party, the greater the ceremony;

and I am not in love with ceremony. Lord Eynsham has already promised to come; I hope you will be able to spare time to be present, Miss Kavanagh?"

"If you wish it, sir."

"If I dared tell a lady so, I should say I insisted upon it. But I would prefer to ask the favour of you. Then, General, may I come at two? Good night, gentlemen. By the way, I fancy I can slip out into Greenfield Street without running the gauntlet of all these people. Miss Kavanagh, would it be presuming on your kindness, if I asked you to show me the way?"

With a bow to the others, he turned and faced the girl. His request was not welcome, but after a moment's rebellious hesitation she led the way in silence through a side door into the great, gloomy, deserted hall of the hotel. Handing his cloak-room ticket to a porter, he pointed to a couple of chairs.

"You are tired?" he asked. "You have become so quiet."

She raised her eyes to his for a moment and dropped them quickly.

"I am—humiliated, sir," she answered in a low voice.

"Because of the 'awful things' you said? I only wish you'd repeat them."

With the toe of her left shoe she explored a pattern in the mosaic pavement.

"Was it—quite fair, sir?" she asked, and there was a note of reproach in her voice. "You—you could see I was only a kid. . . . I mean . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'sir,'" he interrupted impatiently. "You know I prefer to be called 'Kitten.' After all, it's an accepted abbreviation for Christopher."

In spite of herself she smiled at his petulant earnestness.

"I'm afraid I can hardly use it, sir."

"Everybody does."

"Your equals, sir."

The Kitten threw his hands into the air.

"Pat Kavanagh, every one in the world is my equal except you, and that's because you're on a level with the angels in God's heaven. Won't you, if I . . . ?"

He left the sentence unfinished.

"If you order it, sir ?"

"I never give orders, Pat ; sometimes I make requests."

"And this is one ?"

He laid his hand gently on her head and pressed it back until their eyes met.

"I prefer to leave it undefined," he said. "If we're going to be stiff and formal, it matters little what you call me ; if we're going to be friends, as I hoped . . . Would you rather I didn't come tomorrow ? If you tell me to stay away . . ."

"I never give orders, sir," she returned in a tone of demurest parody.

" You make requests; you have preferences."

" I want you to do whatever you wish."

The Kitten lit a cigarette from the stump of his cigar.

" Then I shall come," he said. " After all, when I leave England on Friday, it's long odds I shall never come back."

" So it doesn't matter what you do now ? "

He brooded over her words for some moments.

" Why did you say that ? " he asked at length. " It wasn't very kind, Pat."

" You haven't been very kind to me, sir. You made me think you were just ordinary. . . ."

" I am the most ordinary of men," he answered, slowly shaking his head.

" You are a Prince."

He looked into her eyes and turned away. Some time he would have to tell her the whole truth, but not [illegible] If he blurted it out, the news would be with [illegible] ner in three minutes, and he would be walking down Piccadilly with a plain and unflattering reminder that, if ever he set foot in the Semiramis again, he would be forcibly ejected. The confession must come by gentle stages after due preparation. Looking back over his life since six o'clock that day, the Kitten began to believe in stars and special providences.

" If I were not a Prince, Pat ? " he suggested. " We're man and girl. . . . Good heavens ! What difference does it make ? "

She shook her head.

"But imagine it till Friday!"

There was a sound of footsteps in the distance, and the porter appeared in sight carrying a coat and hat.

"Why are you never coming back to England?" she asked.

"There are so many ways of getting killed nowadays," he answered, with a laugh. "There's no particular reason why I should escape."

She looked up into his face, and this time her eyes were unwavering.

"I hope you will, sir."

He bowed gravely and slipped his arms into the sleeves of his coat.

"Then we're friends, Pat? Great friends? Very great friends?"

"If you wish it, sir."

He caught her hands and swung them gently together.

"And yet—you know nothing about me."

"Don't you think I do, sir?"

She walked with him to the door and stood on the threshold, looking out across the darkened street at the starless night.

"Buona sera," he said, turning to her. "Arrivederla. Buona sera, bellissima fanciulla dagli occhi azzurri."[1]

Her forehead wrinkled in perplexity.

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[1] Good night, my beautiful blue-eyed child.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

He clasped her hand.

"You weren't meant to. Good night and good-bye till to-morrow."

"Good night, sir."

Without warning, and to his extreme discomfiture, she courtesied low and kissed his hand. The hall was empty, and no one was passing in the street, but he felt suddenly ashamed of himself.

"I wish you hadn't done that!" he exclaimed.

She looked at him in surprise, her blue eyes wide open with concern.

"Forgive me, sir."

He broke into an uneasy laugh.

"Don't you see, child, that I'm not fit to touch the hem of your garment?"

"I—I thought I had to."

"That makes it worse, Patsy."

Ten minutes later the Kitten joined his friends at the Alhambra. The revue was almost at an end, and, beyond a brief word of greeting, they paid no attention to his arrival. Seating himself at the back of the box, he gave way to a feeling of loneliness and dissatisfaction. The stage seemed garish, the merriment hollow, and the music strident. It was with relief that he saw the women wrapping themselves in cloaks and the men groping for hats, as the orchestra quickened to the finale. In his absence Nap Fenwick had completed the arrangements for the supper party at Blanco's. The

Kitten wanted above all things to be alone, to wander moodily through the streets, and turn into bed without having to talk or listen. In his new-found melancholy, however, he charged himself with egotism in having followed his own line throughout the evening, and, when Armitage made a favour of the supper invitation, he accepted with polite listlessness.

"Well, I suppose you made a hash of it," Nap Fenwick began encouragingly, as they fitted themselves into a taxi and drove to the restaurant.

"Oh, it went off all right," was the answer. "Sorry I couldn't get here before."

"I hope you brought off a good 'curtain,'" said Armitage. "Nap was extraordinarily effective in getting us away from the Semiramis."

He told the story of the pale, pertinacious journalist, the veiled hints of the Prince's mission, and the triumphal departure to the Foreign Office.

"And now," he concluded, as they entered the restaurant and chose a table, "I think we'd better give the place a wide berth for a bit; the Kitten certainly must. What's anybody going to eat?"

There was a brief, earnest interval in which the menu was exhaustively inspected. The Kitten toyed abstractedly with coffee and a cigar, but the others, who had not blunted their appetites on romance, arranged a varied and generous meal.

"You'd better have something, Kitten," said Armitage.

"It's bad to eat between drinks," was the answer. "I'll wait till we get back to the flat."

"I believe you're takin' this thing seriously," said Osborne, with evident surprise.

"I believe I am," said the Kitten.

"What happened?"

In a few colourless sentences he sketched his meeting with Pat Kavanagh, the arrival of the General, and the unwelcome intervention of Lord Eynsham. Nap Fenwick breathed a trifle more easily when he learned that the Kitten had made good his escape without discovery, but the narrative was so bloodless and jejune that Osborne yawned openly as it proceeded. He was only recalled to a wakeful interest on hearing of the luncheon arrangements for the morrow.

"God! You're not goin' back there?" he exclaimed, in unaffected dismay. "Some people don't know when they're well off. You're askin' for trouble if you think you're goin' to get in and out again without bein' spotted by a pal; you've had more than your fair share of luck as it is."

The Kitten showed no disposition to argue; equally he displayed no signs of being convinced.

"Don't go till I've been round to the Admiralty," begged Armitage. "It's quite on the cards that Channel sailings will be resumed, and, if the real man turns up, there'll be dirty work. You see that?"

The Kitten sighed.

"Oh yes. I'm going, though, whatever happens."

"But why?" Osborne demanded.

The Kitten looked at him compassionately.

"It wouldn't be the least good explaining to you," he said.

It was left to Nap Fenwick to suggest the strongest objection and offer the most damaging criticism. With his glasses aslant and a malicious smile on his face, he had been consuming scrambled eggs and orangeade in an effective silence.

"Who is it that you're actually lunching with?" he inquired, as the discussion flagged.

"The Kavanaghs," answered the Kitten wearily. "It's no use your trying to crab it, Nap."

"I wouldn't think of such a thing," said Fenwick, with an assumption of good-humour. "I was thinking of the other party."

"What other party?"

"Didn't you wire to a girl to lunch with you there?"

The Kitten's face fell, and he sat thunderstruck, a cup of coffee half-way to his lips.

"I look like taking it in the neck," he observed gloomily. "Till you mentioned her, Nap, I'd forgotten her infernal existence."

Fenwick helped himself to more scrambled eggs.

"Lack of concentration," he diagnosed cheerfully. "That's what I tell Osborne. You want a nursemaid to help you conduct an ordinary, squalid amour."

"That depends on the nursemaid," returned the Kitten, with a flicker of the old spirit of promiscuity, which association with Pat Kavanagh had repressed for the last half-hour. "Look here, one of you lads will have to lend me a hand. Armitage, I'll stand you a lunch at the Semiramis Grill to-morrow if you'll entertain the girl. I'd do the same for you any time. She doesn't know me, so you've simply got to sail in and give my name. She's rather a pretty girl from her photo."

Armitage shook his head.

"I can't get out of uniform. She knows you're not in the Navy, whatever your other faults may be."

The Kitten turned to his other neighbour.

"Be a sport, Osborne," he said.

"Not if I know it. You seem to think the Semiramis is a Covent Garden Ball, what?"

"She's a perfect little lady," said the Kitten reassuringly. "They live at West Drayton, and her father's a land surveyor from Rhodesia."

"Then he's got no business to live at West Drayton. Good God! he'll be invitin' me down there next!"

"Well, you could talk big game shop—describe the sjamboks leaping from rock to rock over the measureless veld."

Osborne shook his head no less resolutely than Armitage had done.

"I won't touch it with a pole, Kitten," he said. "And a sjambok's a large-size whip, anyway."

The Kitten threw away his cigar and rose from the table.

"Waste of time asking you, Nap, I suppose?" he inquired. "Well, if any of you are ever in a hole, I hope you'll find three friends as willing and anxious to help you out. I'm going to get a drink."

"Not after nine thirty," said Fenwick, as though he were taking credit for the licensing restrictions. "And no treating at any time."

The Kitten nodded wistfully.

"We deserve to lose this war," was his comment.

"If you really want one," said Osborne, his hospitable soul stirred by his friend's visible distress, "you'll find all you want at my place."

"I don't," answered the Kitten vindictively. "What I want to do is to violate these rotten rules. Nap, I'll bet you a pony I get you an alcoholic drink on licensed premises within half an hour. Any takers?"

"I'll take the drink," said Fenwick cautiously.

The Kitten went outside and ordered a taxi.

"Tring Hotel, Penbury Street," he said; and, when they arrived at the office of a dingy building in Bloomsbury, he ordered four brandies and soda.

"I can't serve you now, gentlemen," answered the manager, with sleepy and ill-suppressed irritability. "You know that as well as I do."

"Can I have a bedroom then?" the Kitten inquired. "Right! One bedroom, four beds, and sixteen brandies and soda. Never mind about sheets."

It was three o'clock before the party broke up in St. James' Street, and Armitage returned to his own rooms after promising to call on the others as soon as he had breakfasted.

"No one can say we've wasted our first evenin', what?" said Osborne, as he led the way upstairs. His two guests paused as he opened the door and turned on the lights. "Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed unexpectedly.

"What's the row?" inquired the Kitten sleepily. "Come to the wrong place? I'm a fixture here whatever happens; my uncle George doesn't like me to keep late hours."

"Some blighter's been burglin' the flat," was the answer, in a tone of indignant surprise.

CHAPTER VIII

RETRIBUTION

THE clock on the dining-room mantelpiece of 423B St. James' Street struck eleven. There was a suggestion of apology in its note, as though the inexorable force of a coiled spring impelled it to a reluctant duty. Clocks, it seemed to feel, were not meant to strike when gentlemen were breakfasting.

Osborne swallowed his last mouthful of toast and marmalade, poured himself out a fourth cup of tea, and began to fill a pipe. He was feeling almost strong enough to talk, but a glance at Nap Fenwick, petulantly slapping the decorous pages of the "Daily Gazette," warned him not to be precipitous. Of the Kitten nothing had been seen or heard. He was presumably still sunk in brutish slumber, and Fenwick malevolently finished the kidneys and choicer parts of the cold grouse on this assumption. Then he pushed back his chair and sighed.

"What are you going to do to-day?" he inquired, throwing away his paper and drawing a chair to the fire.

Osborne shrugged his shoulders.

"Dunno. I was thinkin' of havin' a talk with Merrick some time about the burglary. It's pretty cool, you know; all the windows look out on St. James' Street, and how anyone could break in rather beats me."

"Have they taken much?"

"Not a damned thing, so far as I can make out. That's the extraordinary part of the business. From the look of the place when we got in, there might have been a raid by the Crown Prince in person. Every box and drawer, the very suit-case in my dressin'-room . . ."

"Was there much to steal?" Fenwick interrupted.

"I should rather think there was. Leavin' the silver on one side, there was forty pounds odd in notes lyin' loose on my writin'-table and some pearl studs and buttons and things worth a couple of hundred. By the way, I hope *you* didn't lose anythin'."

"My kit was wrecked," Fenwick answered. "Everything chucked about the room. So was the Kitten's."

Osborne crossed the room and rang the bell. There was some little delay before it was answered, and when Merrick appeared, portly, collected, and suave as a bought-out partner in an amalgamated bank, he carried a tray with one glass on it.

"Bronx, sir," he explained.

"Oh, did I only ring once?" said Osborne, draining it. "Stupid of me! And you know I never drink between meals. Look here, Merrick, you may have observed this mornin' that this place had been burgled."

The man bowed politely.

"I did notice a slight disorder, sir," he said, with a well-bred smile.

The smile puzzled Osborne for a moment.

"Oh, *we* didn't do it, if that's what you mean," he said. "It was like that when we got back. What time did you go to bed?"

"Shortly after twelve, sir."

"And you didn't see or hear anyone?"

"Only your friend, sir."

Osborne raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

"My friend?" he repeated.

"The gentleman you left the note for, sir."

The answer roused Fenwick's curiosity, and he sidled forward from the fireplace and elbowed his way in front of his host.

"How would you describe Captain Osborne's friend?" he asked, in the manner of one conducting a viva voce exploration of St. Paul's missionary journeys.

Merrick put his head on one side and stroked his chin thoughtfully. He was not naturally observant and had small powers of description. The visitor, he said, was an elderly gentleman — how old, he could not say—an elderly gentleman with a quiet voice, rather slow and feeble in his movements, an elderly gentleman . . ."

" Dark or fair, fat or thin ? " interrupted Fenwick, with an impatient suggestion of gamma minus in his voice. " How was he dressed ? Tell us everything you know."

Thus put upon his metal Merrick considered anew. The gentleman was inclined to baldness, though he could not swear to the colour of what hair remained ; emphatically he was thin ; his clothes—Merrick had noticed that he was not in evening dress, but could give no further details, and showed signs of becoming flustered.

" Well, what happened ? " asked Osborne, coming to his rescue. " Tell the story your own way."

The man again stroked his chin and began to look judicial.

" Well, sir, a little before ten last night there come a ring at the bell, and I goes to the door. There was this gentleman waiting outside, and he says, ' Is Captain Osborne in ? ' he says. ' No, sir,' I says, ' Captain Osborne, he's dining out and going to a theatre.' ' Well,' says the gentleman, ' he wants to see me, so I think I'll come in and wait.' ' Would you be the gentleman,' I says, ' that Mr. Osborne left the note for ? ' I says. ' I reckon I am,' he says. So I showed him into the library and give him the papers. He tell me not to wait up on his account, so I shows him his own room and asks him what time he'd like to be called, and whether he'd like a cup of tea in the morning, and he says, not to call him till he rings, and so I haven't been in to him yet."

Merrick reached the end of his tale with evident satisfaction and looked pointedly at the clock, as though seeking authority to disturb the slumberer.

"Thanks, Merrick, that will do," said Nap Fenwick, and, when he and Osborne were once more alone: "It's simplicity itself; I expect it's done every week in these bachelor quarters round St. James' and Jermyn Street. You wait till you see a man go out, then ring and ask if he's at home, then say you'll wait till he comes back. After half an hour, when you've filled your pockets, you ring for the man and say you can't wait any longer and you'll send a note. Of course, if the owner comes in before you've gone, you say you're collecting for the Red Cross."

He lay comfortably back in his chair, well satisfied with his explanation. Osborne, however, shook an incredulous head.

"Won't wash, Nap," he said. "Nothin' was taken."

"He was probably disturbed."

"Not before he'd had time to turn the place upside down."

"*That* was only reconnoitring," explained Fenwick. "Obviously he wouldn't start filling his pockets till he'd seen what was worth taking."

"His best scoop would have been the notes on my writin'-table. They'd have paid his out-of-pockets for the evenin' and wouldn't have taken as much room as a cigarette-case. You're not on the target, Nap."

"He probably . . ."

"You can go on pilin' up 'probablys' all night," Osborne interrupted. "You're not within a mile of it."

"Well, what's *your* theory?" asked Fenwick. He was not interested in his friend's views save in the hope of demolishing them summarily.

"Oh, I haven't got one," Osborne answered. "I only say that yours won't wash."

Their discussion was suspended by a ring at the front door. Both expected to see Armitage shown in, but Merrick entered alone, bearing a card on a salver. Osborne read it carefully and without comment or change of expression; then handed it to Fenwick, who cleaned his glasses and read:

MAJOR STUART LEGRANGE,
International Police Bureau,
Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.

For several moments no one spoke. Fenwick stared at the card, Osborne stared at Fenwick, and the butler alternately looked with grave discretion out of the window and coughed to show that he still awaited orders.

"Show him into the library," said Osborne at length, and in a tone of accusation, with his eyes still on Fenwick's face. "Now we're goin' to foot the bill."

Nap Fenwick crumpled the card between his fingers and walked once or twice up and down the dining-room with his hands locked behind his back. A rapid but critical review of the previous evening only strengthened his cherished belief that their behaviour had been strictly legal. They had masqueraded, but without taking pecuniary advantage of their position; they had sought no credit nor traded a false title as a means of obtaining an engagement. . . . The word brought him up short, and he wondered how far the Kitten had gone in his absence. . . . That was *his* affair, though. Their position was unassailable, yet he quailed before this representative of the police, as he would not have quailed four-and-twenty hours earlier.

"Well?" said Osborne uncompromisingly.

Fenwick continued his prowl without replying. He was not a lawyer, but any doubts of the "unassailable legality" of his position were soothed away by Major Legrange's mode of arrival. The avenger of blood, armed with a warrant, presumably would not send in a card nor consent to await his prospective prisoners' convenience.

"There's nothing to worry about," he told Osborne.

"I said we couldn't carry it off," was the answer, half angry, half merely frightened. "You thorough-goin' fool, Nap!"

"No need to get abusive," said Fenwick stiffly.

"Well, what are you goin' to do? This feller's waitin'."

"Why not have him in?"

"And then what?"

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"We're water-tight," he said. "If you don't want to see this Legrange, you can send him away, only I'm afraid he'll only come back later. The police are, I understand, a pertinacious breed. If you see him, you're conferring a favour on him, remember that! And you can just tell him nothing."

"Useful sort of favour," Osborne commented.

"You can tell him everything, if you like. Have him in, let him lodge his complaint, tell him the whole story—treating it as a joke, of course—offer him a drink and, if he's nasty, tell him to go to hell. On the whole, I rather favour a clean breast. . . ."

"And all the fun of seein' the thing in the evenin' papers? 'Practical Joke at the Semiramis. Captain in the Irish Guards and Sham Italian Prince.' It's not good enough, Nap. *You* wouldn't be popular even in your old Carter Paterson business."

Fenwick ignored the insult to the Transport Service and thought rapidly.

"It's either that," he said, "or else we've got to go on as we've begun. If we can get the Kitten in to speak impressive Italian . . ." He broke off and laid his hand on Osborne's arm. "Send for this fellow and make him state his case, while I hold the Kitten under the cold tap."

He hurried out of the room without leaving time for a reply, and Osborne, after an interval of indecision, shrugged his shoulders and rang the bell. A few moments later Merrick ushered in a tall, spare man with black hair, a drooping moustache, vigilant eyes, and square-bridged nose.

"Captain Osborne?" he inquired in a crisp, business-like voice, glancing at the clock as he spoke. "I'm sorry to disturb you. If I'd known you were breakfasting, I'd have called later, of course. You had rather a late night."

He smiled under cover of his heavy moustache, and Osborne was not reassured.

"Oh, I'm through," he said. "If I'd known you were callin', I'd have breakfasted earlier. No good offerin' you a bit of game-pie, is it?"

"Thanks, I breakfasted at eight," said Legrange.

"What a life!" commented Osborne gloomily. "You'll have a cigar, though."

The cigar was accepted, also an arm-chair by the fire, and Legrange came without delay to the purpose of his call, while Osborne seated himself on the club fender and glanced vainly at the door through which Fenwick had disappeared.

"Am I right in thinking that you have a visitor staying with you?" he began.

"Two," answered Osborne, lighting a match and handing it to the Major.

"One of—considerable distinction?"

Osborne said nothing for a moment. He had a feeling that Fenwick had betrayed him, that he was insufficiently tutored, and that the Major's vigilant eyes were reading him, while he stammered and hesitated, uncertain whether he was to pile up evidence against himself by describing the adventures of the previous evening or to preserve an air of diplomatic mystery by refusing plain answers to simple questions.

"Are you callin' officially?" he inquired at length.

"However you like," Major Legrange answered, drawing a newspaper from his pocket and handing it across. "There's really no secret about your guest; his coming was known beforehand, and the 'Daily Gazette' mentions his arrival. I've put a cross in the margin."

Osborne glanced at the marked paragraph.

"Among those who dined last night at the Semiramis Hotel," he read, "was Prince Christoforo of Catania, who, we understand, has come to England on a confidential mission."

"Oh well, no good makin' cheap mysteries," he said.

"Do I gather that the Prince wished his visit to be kept a secret ?" asked Legrange. "Of course from the very nature of the mission . . ."

"You know what it is ?" Osborne interrupted.

Major Legrange laughed.

"Unofficially I can make as good a guess as most," he said. "And, putting two and two together, I imagine the Prince wouldn't be keeping his movements dark or staying informally with a friend like yourself, if he'd merely run over to buy a suit of clothes. The very fact of his coming by the earlier boat yesterday told its own story. . . . Officially I only know that he dined last night at the Semiramis, looked in at the Alhambra, spent a short time at Blanco's, called at the Tring Hotel . . ."

Osborne looked at him with a certain dismayed admiration; the reference to his late night was now explained.

"I say, there are no flies on your department," he exclaimed.

Legrange bowed.

"I am personally responsible for the Prince's well-being so long as he is in England. I confess I had a bad moment yesterday evening."

"Over that submarine ?"

"Oh no! Departmentally speaking, I don't care how many times His Highness gets drowned—that's the Admiralty's look out. I've got to see that he comes to no harm till I've handed him back to the Admiralty, the Admiralty carries on till he reaches France, and there the French branch of our bureau takes charge till he gets to Switzerland, and so on."

" And is he never out of your sight ? " cried Osborne.

Legrange coughed discreetly.

" I shall be at hand in case I am needed."

Osborne drew a deep breath.

" If I were the Prince, I should spend all my spare time tryin' to dodge you."

" The Prince is used to it. My dear sir, a man in his position is never allowed to go anywhere unprotected. That was the bad moment I was speaking of—when he came by the early boat, and I lost touch with him for two and a half hours. If anything had happened to him, I should have been broken over it."

Osborne drummed his heels against the pillars of the fender and whistled between his teeth. His sense of humour was doubly tickled by the thought of so many precautions being lavished on a bogus prince and by his appreciation of the Kitten's dismay on learning with what attentive interest his youthful romances were being followed.

" I say, d'you know the Prince ? " he inquired abruptly.

" Not to speak to. Of course, since yesterday evening I know him very well by sight."

" H'm. Well, I know him well enough to say that all this shadowin' must be most distasteful to him. In his case I should drop it."

Legrange shrugged his shoulders.

"My department doesn't do it for its own amusement," he said. "And, so far from dropping it, I've come here this morning to ask for your assistance . . ."

"I . . ."

Legrange waved away the interruption.

"I'll offer a *quid pro quo*," he promised. "The help I want from you is this—an undertaking that you will not let the Prince go unattended so long as he is your guest, and, if he changes his address—which, by the way, he might very profitably do at frequent intervals—that you will let me know. In return, I'll undertake not to shadow him, as you call it, so long as you are with him. I have my reasons for making the request."

Osborne looked thoughtfully at the strong, sane face before him. It was reassuring and substantial in the world of topsy-turvydom into which he had dropped.

"Any harm in askin' the reasons?" he inquired.

Legrange smiled diplomatically.

"You would make my position easier," he replied courteously, "by not pressing the question."

"I'm thinkin' of the Prince," was the blunt answer.

For the first time Legrange frowned a little impatiently

"These are very ordinary precautions," he argued. There was no answer. "I have already dropped more than one hint." Osborne was still uncompromisingly silent; and the Major sighed. "Well, if you want it in so many words, the Prince is in personal danger."

Osborne removed his pipe from his mouth and stared at his boots. The action was calculated and had the effect of concealing his face for precious seconds while he composed himself. He was about to speak when the sound of voices broke upon his ear, and the door was thrown open. The Kitten, white-faced and dark-eyed, but smiling and self-possessed, walked in, followed by Fenwick.

Osborne sprang to his feet.

"I ask your leave, sir, to present Major Legrange, of the International Police Bureau. Major Legrange is responsible for all the arrangements for your personal safety while you are in England."

CHAPTER IX

A DIGRESSION ON CRIME

THE Kitten bowed graciously and held out his hand to the Major.

" S'accomodi, signore,"[1] he said. " Parla italiano ? [2] Pray be seated." He set an example by drawing a chair in to the table and lifting the covers off the hot dishes, while Osborne poured out and handed him a cup of strong, tepid tea. " Forgive me, please, for not having breakfasted before. I trust my personal safety is not in dispute ? "

Legrange smiled apologetically.

" One likes to take all precautions," he said.

" But England is so law-abiding," said the Kitten, buttering himself a piece of sodden toast. " That was always its greatest charm to a man like myself. I could always slip over and spend a few days with a friend like Captain Osborne without fuss of any kind."

" That was in peace-time, sir," the Major reminded him.

The Kitten spread out his hands in a gesture of entreaty.

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[1] Pray be seated, sir.

[2] You speak Italian ? No ?

"That at least has been left unchanged? A friendly private visit, eh?"

"If that were all, sir, well and good."

"But what else?" the Kitten demanded, with carefully exaggerated surprise.

"I have no means of knowing, sir. The Press states openly, in spite of the Censorship, that you have come on a confidential mission, and the gossip in the clubs is that a treaty is to be concluded for the partition of the Balkans and is being carried through so urgently that there is no time for the usual diplomatic channels to be employed." He paused, but there was an artistic absence of expression on the face opposite him. "In a word, sir, you are supposed to have plenary powers. Of course, I do not dream of asking your opinion of such a story, but I beg you to believe that it is being circulated; two journalists discussed it freely at the Semiramis Hotel last night within thirty yards of you."

The Kitten nodded his understanding.

"And the bearing of all this?" he inquired.

"The terms of any such treaty, sir," answered Legrange, "would be of considerable interest both to neutrals and belligerents in the Balkans; the treaty itself might shorten the war by six months, and for that reason the agents of the German Government would strain every nerve to get hold of the papers."

"Assuming such things are put in writing," said the Kitten quietly.

Major Legrange was silent, more from delicacy than conviction.

The Kitten looked at him inquiringly.

"I—I have my reputation to consider, sir," he said, in some embarrassment.

"But it's not in jeopardy."

Osborne felt that it was time to come to Legrange's rescue.

"The Major thinks it is, sir," he said. "He has told me that he thinks you're runnin' a personal danger."

Legrange nodded and looked away; Fenwick exchanged glances with Osborne; the Kitten thoughtfully sipped his tea, reviewing the prospect of being shadowed, until the real Prince arrived, and then ignominiously exposed, if by that time he had not been assassinated in error.

"You mean that I'm liable to be shot in the street to keep my mission from being fulfilled?" asked the Kitten, with tranquil deliberation.

"I mean that every precaution should be taken to guard against such an attempt, sir."

The Kitten rose from the table, lighted a cigarette, and took up a position with his back to the fire.

"Do you want me to go about with a bodyguard?" he asked. "Frankly, Major, all this is most distasteful to me."

Legrange bowed.

"So, unfortunately, Captain Osborne gave me to understand."

"It's simply . . ." His voice was growing impatient, but he checked himself and broke into a laugh. "I was going to say it was intolerable, Major; I prefer to say that you will greatly, *very* greatly oblige me by taking no steps to have me followed."

To this there was no answer. Legrange shook his head in gentle, reluctant resignation, and rose to his feet. Before he could gather up his hat and umbrella, Nap Fenwick intervened.

"If I may make a suggestion, sir," he said, "it would be as well if Major Legrange gave us the grounds of his anxiety. So far," he went on, turning to the Major, "it's all rather vague. A story gets about which *may* be true, and some one *may* believe it, and, if he believes it, he *may* do something violent."

The Kitten accepted the suggestion with a tolerably good grace. After freeing himself from the inconvenience of being shadowed, he regarded the discussion as ended and did not thank his zealous friend for reopening it. Legrange, on the other hand, grasped at the excuse for re-presenting his case.

"I'm afraid my anxiety's only too well founded," he said. "You understand that our department keeps a very close watch on suspicious characters, and, as a rule, there's not much that we don't know about their movements or their intentions. At this moment there is a handful of men in London that I know to be in German pay, and a much larger number that I have good reason to suspect." He turned to the Prince. "One was within a few yards of Your Highness at a certain period of yesterday; fortunately, you were not alone. My duty, sir, is to keep these undesirable persons from embarrassing your freedom of action."

"But why don't you put 'em under lock and key?" Osborne inquired. "You're apparently drawin' a line round the Prince and lettin' them go free."

The Major shook his head.

"It's simple, but not practicable," he said. "When war broke out a large number of suspicious characters—disappeared. We just stretched out our hands and put them where they could do no mischief till the war was over, and the result has been that in two years of war there's not been a single outrage—shooting, dynamite, what you will—not a single railway line or bridge blown up throughout the length and breadth of the land. The Germans were always supposed to have a very perfect system of planting out their secret agents, but we may claim that our system of countering it was fairly comprehensive and fairly silent. You have not heard complaints of wrongful imprisonments, Captain Osborne?"

"No. You seem to have let some of the little 'uns slip through the meshes, though."

Legrange laughed.

"The little ones? My dear sir, it is the big ones who are still swimming about. The little ones are out of harm's way, and the reason they're there, the reason they don't complain, is that they *are* little ones." He turned to the Prince. "We're always supposed, sir, to have one law for great and small, rich and poor, but a man has to leave that behind when he enters the secret police. My department is the most highly organized tyranny in the world, and the reason why I ask to be allowed to arrange special precautions during your stay in England is that the really dangerous men are still at large, and they're at large because we daren't touch them on account of their big positions, until they commit themselves. But I expect in Italy, sir, your government is faced with precisely the same difficulty."

The Kitten shook his head and disclaimed all special knowledge of the Italian secret police. He was becoming interested, however, and begged the Major to go on. Thereupon Legrange sketched the natural history of crime as it had come under his observation, first the casual, spontaneous crime of the amateur pricked thereto by sudden temptation or gusty passion, then the calculated crime of the professional, lastly the organized crime of the scientific and co-ordinated imagination.

"The casual criminal you'll always catch," he explained. "He hasn't thought out his crime before or after. The professional you'll catch when he's over-confident—they all grow like that—or unlucky or impatient. You may have heard of the Ripley Diamond Case, sir. Dawson, the cracksman, thought it all out beforehand, took a house two miles from Ripley Court, gave himself out to be an invalid and established himself in the odour of sanctity. He had a resident physician and a man to wheel him about—he was supposed to be suffering from creeping paralysis; they elected him to the county club, Lord Ripley invited him to dinner half a dozen times. Then he spoiled everything by burgling the house while the family was in residence. He couldn't wait, he'd spent all his capital, and the rent and expenses generally were running on. In scientific crime, on the other hand, with the public purse supporting you, there's no limit to the time you can give to preparing the soil. That was seen over the Polish railways."

"What happened there?" asked the Kitten.

"Oh, when the Russian Government began to build their strategic railways through Poland, copies of the plans reached Berlin three days after they had been passed by the Russian General Staff. The man who gave them away had entered the drawing office as a boy of sixteen—and he'd been learning Russian for eight years before that. When he'd got rid of the copies he returned to the drawing office for a couple of years and only left when he was pensioned off on account of lung trouble after the railways had been begun beyond recall. Again in your own war over Tripoli, the secret was betrayed by a Government proof-reader —he'd recovered from his lung trouble by then— who spoke faultless Italian, had an Italian name, married an Italian wife and came to the Government with unimpeachable credentials from one of the largest ecclesiastical printers in Rome. He was a man of some versatility, for he used to take his holidays near Toulon as an English doctor."

" Did he practise ? " Fenwick asked.

" Oh yes. He overreached himself, though. The French are a suspicious people, and they thought he was taking too great an interest in their naval construction. He might have brazened it out, but unfortunately an English lady brought him her daughter with a cut foot, and he bungled the treatment so badly that the leg had to be amputated at the knee. An action for damages was pending, but our friend thought it prudent to bolt. He'd stage-managed the affair pretty thoroughly, but he hadn't taken the precaution to get qualified as a doctor."

Legrange threw the stump of his cigar into the fire, glanced at the clock and rose from his chair.

" And what's happened to him now ? " inquired the Kitten.

" He's in London, sir."

" With that record ? "

" He has no record, sir. What I've given you as certainties would rank no higher than crude suspicions in a law court. He left Petersburg and

Rome without a stain on his character, in one case with a pension, as I've told you. It's just possible that you could identify him with the Toulon doctor, but that's getting ancient history now, and the most substantial charge you could bring was that he once practised without being registered. The French police can't help, because he never quite committed himself."

"But haven't you got identification marks?" asked Fenwick.

"How could we? We've never had an opportunity of examining him or taking his finger-prints. His is a common enough face without anything to distinguish it except a sort of large dimple, a gash running down the middle of the chin, and that's easily covered by a beard. No, he may be a very dangerous rascal or an innocent, honest man. My department, as I told you, is an organized tyranny, and I'm avowedly paid to be suspicious, but we can't lose sight of the possibility that some men may be not guilty."

In Osborne's eyes the secret police belonged to the dream-world of a railway bookstall, or autumn melodrama; his imagination contemplated reckless foreign countesses, drugged coffee, secret staircases, bloodhounds, throne-rooms, and revolvers.

"Arrest him on spec," he suggested — in his favourite novels innocent men were always being arrested when they were not ordering special trains or getting themselves kidnapped—" and pay compensation if he's innocent. It'd be cheap at the price."

"Ah, if that were all you had to pay! He's a neutral subject—naturally, he would be; if you deport him, there'll be a protest from his Ambassador; if you imprison him, it might mean a declaration of war. And, as I've said again and again, he *may* be innocent; I wouldn't risk my reputation on his guilt. He's a man of means, living in a good house, entertaining largely, invited out by everybody—we daren't touch him. He was in the country some years before the war—immediately after the beginning of the Tripoli campaign, in fact—and he's been steadily making his position impregnable. For what it's worth, he could get half the Cabinet to swear to his *bona fides*." Legrange laughed and turned to the Kitten. "These are some of our difficulties, sir, and we're grateful for any help in overcoming them. I was trying to strike a bargain with Captain Osborne when you came in, that, if he would make it his business to advise me of your movements and act as an unofficial escort, I would undertake to keep in the background. I hope you don't regard that as unreasonable."

The Kitten frowned at the revival of this request. Osborne was an improvement on Legrange as an escort, but even Osborne would be sadly in the way at that day's luncheon party.

"Excuse me, Major, if I have a word in private with Captain Fenwick," he said, and withdrew to the window. "Look here, Nap," he whispered impatiently, "this isn't good enough. I'm going to tell him the whole story."

"I was waiting for that," Fenwick answered, with a dawning sneer.

"Well, it's the only thing to do. I'm not going to have the whole of my leave mucked up over this business."

"I shall enjoy hearing you telling him."

"That won't be as bad as having old Osborne grinning like a fountain-pen advertisement all through lunch."

Fenwick raised his eyebrows in affected astonishment.

"You surely don't imagine you'll be able to lunch at the Semiramis if you give yourself away to him? You've got about as much imagination as a Civil Servant, Kitten."

The Kitten was silent, and victory lay with Nap Fenwick.

"Go back and accept his terms," he ordered, and the orders were obeyed.

The Major was tolerably well satisfied with the compromise and offered his thanks for the interview.

"I hope, sir," he said, with a bow to the Kitten, "that you will go back to Italy with the feeling that I have been over-zealous and over-officious."

The Kitten laughed good-humouredly.

"I certainly hope your precautions will be unnecessary," he said, "but I cannot help being very sensible of your trouble and kindness. And Captain Osborne will have the satisfaction of feeling sure that as long as I am his guest there will be no repetition of last night's burglary."

Legrange's expression became attentive, and his eyes narrowed at the word.

"You have had a burglary here?"

The Kitten nodded, and Osborne told the story of the disordered flat and of the mysterious visitor of the previous evening. Merrick was again summoned and again compelled to give his version, which he did without adding anything to his former account. Legrange examined and re-examined him on the description of the elderly man, hinting, suggesting and leading, all without result. Finally he produced a leather wallet from his hip-pocket and selected a faded, yellow photograph.

"Was that the man?" he inquired eagerly.

Merrick barely looked at it.

"Oh no, sir," he said. "He was older than that."

"This was taken five or six years ago."

"He was older than that," the man repeated and, a moment later, withdrew.

Legrange put a few questions to Osborne on the length of time that Merrick had been with him and his general behaviour as a servant. Whether the replies were satisfactory, it is impossible to say;

the Major's only comment was a generalization on the unobservant stupidity of the uneducated—a stricture which Osborne imagined for a moment to be directed against himself.

As the photograph was about to be restored to its place, the Kitten asked permission to see it.

"It's the man I was telling you about, sir," said Legrange, as he handed it over. "The draughtsman-proof-reader-doctor. That was taken during the last phase before he came to England, outside the Café de l'Europe in Toulon—where he was thought to be taking too great an interest in the French navy."

The Kitten carried the photograph to the window and inspected it through a magnifying glass; then he picked up a pencil, shaded in a beard and handed it back to the Major.

Legrange looked from the photograph to the Kitten, whose face had now lost all trace of indifference and boredom.

"Have you actually met him, sir?"

"He was in the Semiramis last night—taking too great an interest in me, I thought, Major; there's no question about the identity of the man; that photograph shows the chin dimple you were speaking of. You can arrest him out of hand."

Legrange smiled wistfully.

"Would you swear to the dimple, sir, under that beard?"

"Shave the beard," suggested the Kitten impetuously. "From your account the man's a public danger of the worst order."

"Officially I only know of him as the London correspondent of an Ohio paper and a citizen of the United States of America," answered Legrange, as he prepared to take his leave.

CHAPTER X

SUPER-CRIME

AS the door closed behind Major Legrange, Osborne turned upon Nap Fenwick.

"You almighty fool!" he exclaimed venomously. There was no very pertinent reason for the outburst, but the strain of the interview had been too much for his nerves.

Fenwick, without looking at him, pulled an armchair in front of the fire, filled a pipe, and composed himself to finish reading the morning paper. His aloofness was disconcerting. Osborne fidgeted for a few moments, addressed him by name twice, and finally summoned courage to advance and snatch away the paper.

"Look here, Nap," he said, "this rot's got to stop."

Fenwick looked up at him over the top of his slanting glasses.

"Stop it then," he advised. "I'm not hindering you."

Osborne turned away and paced indignantly up and down the room.

A telephone stood on a small table by the fire: he had only to ring up Legrange and explain away what had happened. . . . As he hesitated by the window, the explanation seemed less and less easy to frame. All would have been well if he had confessed the moment that his visitor entered the room: no apologies would now soothe a man who had for half an hour been ordering himself lowly and reverently to a bogus prince. He turned from the window and faced the Kitten, who was swinging his legs on the edge of the breakfast-table and idly glancing through an illustrated paper.

"*You* see it can't go on, what?" he said, appealing from the irrational to the rational. The Kitten looked up from his paper with a yawn.

"What's the row?" he inquired. "Oh, this game. Yes, it's got to stop. Uncle George wouldn't like it. Any time you like after lunch, but I've simply got to keep it up till I'm through with the Kavanaghs. I shall try to get Pat on one side afterwards and tell her, so that she can break it gently to her people."

"Her people be damned!" answered Osborne. "Legrange is the man you've got to tell. You don't seem to appreciate that you may take a knife in the back any moment." The Kitten snorted derisively. "Oh, it's your look out, I know, but I'm not goin' to have you bleedin' to death on my mat. You young fool, one of the gang got in here within an hour of our dinin' at the Semiramis, any number more . . ."

He stopped, as the door opened and Armitage was announced. The Kitten greeted him with a view-hallo ; Nap Fenwick nodded curtly, as though his mind were occupied with other things ; Osborne pushed him into a chair and with rare volubility and unwonted fire gave him a full account of the burglary overnight and Legrange's visit, ending with a piece of artless but vigorous invective directed against his two guests for remaining blind to the gravity of the position.

Armitage smiled appreciatively.

"You seem to have got into a pretty tidy mess," was his comment. Like the Kitten, he declined to visualize assassins lurking in the courts and entries round St. James' Street. "Well, if you ask my advice, as Nap landed you in it, I should make him dam' well get you out."

At sound of his name Fenwick threw his legs over an arm of the chair and twisted himself to face the room.

"Technically, I suppose you're all scheduled as belonging to the educated classes," he observed thoughtfully and turned again to the fire.

"The Grand Manner," murmured the Kitten wearily.

Armitage, however, was not accustomed to tone or manner. Within three seconds he had crossed the hearthrug, tumbled Fenwick out of his chair, laid him on the floor and covered his head with a cushion, on which he proceeded to seat himself, smilingly but heavily.

"You're breaking my glasses," said a muffled voice.

"They never suited you," answered Armitage. "Look here, Nap, I'm full of cheer this morning. Did you ever see a play where some blighter came in and made epigrams? Every time he made an epigram, he had his head ducked in a pail of water. Well, every time you try the Grand Manner stunt, I shall sit on your head till the fit's passed. I haven't scrapped with anyone for four days and I want exercise."

With a friendly pat on the midriff, which left Fenwick white and gasping, he jumped up.

"You'll find him more tractable now," he told the Kitten and Osborne. "Now he can give *his* views on the situation. By the way, I've forgotten the drill for getting a cocktail here, Lionel."

While Osborne rang the bell, Fenwick set himself to analyse the position and reject the proposals of his companions. Anyone, he told Osborne, who chose to beard Legrange was welcome to do so; it would entail a stimulating interview, though without the variety which the Kitten might expect from General Sir John Kavanagh, G.C.B., Miss Patricia Kavanagh, the Right Honourable the Lord Eynsham, K.T., G.C.M.G., the manager, head waiter, butler, and bandmaster of the Semiramis Hotel.

"Beyond a possibly new experience," he told them, appreciatively noting their dejected expressions, " I fail to see what you achieve beyond a somewhat tardy concession to truth. You don't get rid of Henley and his gang: *they* won't know that the Kitten isn't the Prince unless Legrange or Kavanagh writes to the papers to expose him. And I hardly see them doing that; it would be a poor compliment to their own astuteness. Of course, you can write to the papers yourselves."

Osborne shuddered with the shock to his sense of propriety and shook his head.

"They'd accept it all right," Fenwick went on, wilfully misunderstanding the gesture. " Of course, you'd have to give all the names.—'Captain Lionel Osborne of the Irish Guards was the hero of a daring hoax at the Semiramis last night. In company with Lieutenant Armitage of H.M.S. "Princess E[illegible]da," Lieutenant Christopher Markham . . .' "

" Oh, dry up!" growled Osborne.

Fenwick smiled maliciously.

" It isn't *quite* so simple, is it?" he asked.

Osborne bridled at the sneer.

" That's all jolly fine, Nap," he protested. " You got us into this hole, didn't you, what? And now you calmly give us the choice of an impossible showin' up in the Press or a knife in the back for the Kitten, but when it comes to findin' a way out . . ."

" You haven't asked me yet," Fenwick interrupted. " When you've got rid of your superfluous froth . . ."

" Careful ! " said Armitage warningly.

Nap Fenwick shrugged his shoulders and established himself with widely spread legs on the hearthrug.

" You *can't* get out of it without an exposure," he began, beating out his points with a lean, crooked forefinger. " And the position's about as serious as it can be. I'm honestly convinced that Legrange is right and that the Kitten may take a bullet in the brain any moment." He paused to study the faces of his audience. There was now no banter in his tone, and the others responded to his grim sincerity. He turned to Osborne. " I suppose you don't put your own dignity above the Kitten's life ? If there has to be a scandal, you'll face it ? I thought so. And I suppose, Kitten, you don't think your lunch to-day is worth the risk of a bomb in the street ? Good ! There seem to be rudiments of intelligence in both of you ; would it be straining your imagination too far if I suggested another alternative ? " The Grand Manner was returning to him, but Armitage did not choose to repress it. " Have any of you fellows thought about the real Prince ? "

There was a moment's silence.

" We're really not responsible for him," said Armitage.

" Agreed. It's his job. We just tell the story of the hoax, shake off Henley & Co., give the Semiramis a wide berth, enjoy our ninety-six hours' leave and go back to France on Friday. If the Prince gets killed, that's his affair."

" He'll have the police to protect him," Osborne urged. " Legrange will be keepin' a look out."

" And if there's an accident ? "

" Oh, well, you know, we're not Providence, what ? "

Fenwick looked at him, with lurking triumph in his eyes.

" We can be an uncommon fine imitation," he said. " We can draw Henley's fire, for one thing ; and with a little luck, a little forethought, a little arrangement, we can put him out of action. You said you wanted a scrap, Armitage ; here's your opportunity. You must make up your minds now, all of you. The Prince will probably arrive in London to-day, and we're going to lay Henley by the heels before he can do any harm. I assume he's the man Legrange thinks he is, I assume he's maturing a criminal attack of some kind ; we must get in our blow first. We may have to intimidate the fellow, we may have to kidnap him. . . ." He paused and looked in turn into the eyes of his three companions. " We may have to be—more drastic still. And, for our pains, we may find that he's an innocent American newspaper man or that the Prince is coming to England on private business. I . . . I've put the case as fairly as I can. It's risky and it's thin. Do you men care to see me through with it ? I—to put the thing crudely—I don't want to feel that a man has been killed when I had it in my power to save him—particularly if he's over here on the mission I think."

His voice had become curiously appealing, and he spoke under the influence of strong emotion. There was no personal attachment between the Prince, whom he had not seen for ten years, and himself, but he had weighed and tested one hypothesis after another until he was himself convinced. Of the secret mission, the plot to frustrate it, and the need for a counterplot, he entertained no doubts. The excitement of discovery was upon him, sharpened by anticipated opposition. Conviction was not to be found on the faces before him.

"Nothin' doin'," said Osborne, determinedly shaking his head. "We're bogged deep enough without slidin' in any further."

Nap Fenwick turned to the Kitten.

"You've got nothing in the wide to go on," was the answer to his look of inquiry.

"You saw the photograph—and the man."

"And the beard. That's just our weak point. I'm good for a rag in all conscience, but I rather draw the line at doing a man in when a pro like Legrange can't swear to him."

Fenwick turned to Armitage.

"What about you ? " he asked.

"Do I understand that you're going through in any event?"

Fenwick nodded.

"Oh, then I'll stand in with you. We can't do much, though, unless the Kitten goes on drawing Henley's fire."

The Kitten hesitated for many minutes. In his heart he believed that the bluff, bearded journalist was the same man as had once sold military secrets from Petrograd, Rome, and Toulon; his imagination was limited, however, and he could not visualize a group of secret agents formulating a plot in the Semiramis lounge or preparing to carry it out in St. James' Street. Still less could he accustom himself to realize that he had assumed a second personality and taken over the assets and liabilities of another. His overnight escapade lingered pleasantly in his memory as an undergraduate freak.

"It will be almost impossible to do anything without you," Nap Fenwick said to him ingratiatingly.

The Kitten looked reflectively round the room, and his eyes caught sight of the clock, which was marking one. A recollection of his conflicting luncheon engagements rushed into his mind.

"Look here," he said. "I'll back you up, if you'll do the same for me. If one of you three will entertain my guest at lunch, I'll join the Coalition, and we'll have pool-night this evening."

Armitage affected to weigh the proposed compromise.

"That's fair enough," he said at length.

The Kitten held out his hand.

"Done! Her name's Grace Claymore; I don't know her age——"

"Past mark of mouth," interjected Osborne. No longer able to control, he could still criticize.

". . . But she looks from her photo as though she'd got dark hair and an invalid mother. Her father, as I told you, is a land surveyor from Rhodesia, and she's frightfully keen on the native Lancashire drama. If you walk in and give my name . . ."

"Oh, it won't be me," said Armitage, shaking his head. "She knows you're in the Army; it would be no good my turning up in this kit."

Nap Fenwick looked at him with the baffled rage of one who bids lavishly for his own possessions at an auction—and finds his bid accepted.

"I've got to mark down Henley," he said, recovering himself. "Before we can go any further, we must find out whether he's really the man we think he is—I'm going to the Semiramis to scrape acquaintance with him, but there's no reason why Osborne shouldn't entertain the girl."

Osborne smiled with knowing self-satisfaction.

"I'm not on this act at all," he said.

"Oh, you're admittedly a dirty dog," said Armitage, with scornful promptitude. "It's nothing to brag about, though. Kitten, you'd better ring her up and smooth things over by sending a box of chocolates to West Drayton or Uganda or wherever she lives, and some cod-liver oil for the invalid mother."

The Kitten shook his head.

"If I did a thing like that," he said, "my uncle George would never speak to me again."

There was an undisguised deadlock for a few minutes, and each looked to his neighbour for a suggestion. At last Osborne glanced across to Fenwick.

"I didn't mean ever to set foot inside the Semiramis again," he said, "but, if Nap will entertain this girl, I'll stalk Henley. You're in a minority of one, Nap, and nobody's cottonin' on to your rotten idea much, so I advise you to snap up a good offer before it's too late."

Fenwick had all a Cabinet minister's art in yielding ungracefully to *force majeure*. Accepting the inevitable, he lectured his companions for ten minutes on the duties which lay before them, broke off to inform Merrick that the Kitten was an August Personage travelling incognito, resumed his lecture, and was only arrested in his eloquence by a reminder from the August Personage that the luncheon engagement was for one-thirty.

At a quarter to two Armitage and the Kitten came to the revolving glass door of the Semiramis lounge. Having no tie of duty or pleasure, Armitage walked on along Piccadilly until he reached his club ; the Kitten, under pretext of lighting a cigarette, paused and peered through the door. The lounge was almost full, but it seemed as if his luck were likely to hold, for the only people he knew there were the people he had expected to see. In one of the armchairs by the orchestra's gallery Pat Kavanagh sat turning over the pages of a magazine, while Fenwick, still unattached, glanced impatiently at his watch and scanned the faces of the passers-by. Osborne was seated near the door, watchfully observant of a large, blue-suited man in conversation with a half-hidden girl. The man was gesticulating and laughing in evident good-humour, and once, when he turned his head, the Kitten caught sight of a round beard and recognized him as Henley.

There seemed no object in waiting longer in the cold street. The Kitten set the glass door revolving, delivered up his coat and hat, and walked with confident step, albeit with quickly beating heart, up the gangway to the half-circle of chairs under the gallery.

CHAPTER XI

BLINDFOLDED DUELLING

TO a man fresh from the trenches, the lounge of the Semiramis represented heaven without any of the formalities there anticipated. It was scented, warm, and light, peopled with slender girls in transparent clothes and melodious with unambitious music. Late at night or early in the morning, it never quite lost its savour of cocktails and Turkish cigarettes, its air of having stopped the clock hands ten minutes before an agreeable meal. The men who went there were opulent without being shamefaced, the women respectable in everything but character; if not scrupulous, all were at least eminently companionable.

The Kitten was always well content to spend his leave there, hinting to strangers that he had met their brothers in the Danish West Indies or that their fathers must have been at Rugby with his uncle George. To-day, however, his one idea was to reach the chairs by the orchestra without being recognized or accosted. Deliberately he avoided the eyes of Fenwick and Osborne and walked quickly down the gangway without looking to right or left.

He was half-way to the Restaurant steps when a female voice at his side said:

"I'm not *going* to let you cut me like that!"

He stopped and looked up to find himself faced by a tall, dark girl in large black hat and white coat and skirt. To the Kitten's practised eye, she represented South Kensington and the Parliamentary Bar, golf and a week-end cottage at the North Foreland, subscription dances at the Empress Rooms preceded by legal dinners and abundant port wine. He knew everything about her except her name.

"Have you forgotten the tennith tournament at Deal?" she asked reproachfully.

"Am I likely to?" responded the Kitten gallantly. Up to the present he had failed to find his bearings, for an exactly similar girl, with the same rather languishing eyes and cultivated lisp, had been his companion in misfortune the summer before the war, when he stole a car in Eaton Square half-way through [illegible] insolvent company-promoter's ball and dro[illegible] andom as far as New Barnet, where the car [illegible] down. Deal only lingered in his memory as the place where the studiedly vivacious wife of an Indian Legal Member had told him that boys of his age did not know the meaning of love.

"It was—just before the war, wasn't it?" he went on recklessly.

She nodded and held out her left hand to show him the gold watch on her wrist.

" It was awful luck your finding it," she said. " I'd quite made up my mind I thouldn't thee it again. Are you home on leave ? "

" I'm in England for a few days," was the answer. The Kitten had now found time to look round and was not a little embarrassed to see that his companion was the same girl that he had half seen through the glass door from Piccadilly and that, standing deferentially a pace behind her and clutching a green cigar, was the London correspondent of the " New Nottingham Times."

" Ith there any chanth of theeing you before you go back ? " the girl inquired.

" Quite impossible, I'm afraid," answered the Kitten. Her name was still wanting, but this was not the reason for his refusal. As the memories of his campaign at Deal sorted themselves out, he recalled that he had met a frankly dishonest girl who unblushingly laid claim to a watch-bracelet which he had bought in London the previous week. He was not of a calculating habit, but the girl was clearly not worth six guineas. " I'm engaged every moment of my time, and I must ask you to excuse me now ; I see some one waiting for me."

With an apologetic bow and smile the Kitten hurried away, and the girl resumed her seat.

" Guess you'll have to pop round to the store and buy a bit bigger hat, Miss Franklin," said the American, replacing the green cigar in his mouth.

"What ith the matter with thith one?" she asked.

"Guess I didn't mean that. It was some honour, though, to be singled out that way. Half the gals here would give an eye to have as much notice taken of them."

Miss Franklin looked at him in uncomprehending astonishment.

"By Kit Markham?" she demanded, with scornful incredulity.

"*Who?*"

"Kit Markham."

Henley looked at her in perplexity.

"Say, are you monkeying, Miss Franklin?" he asked, "or don't you really know?"

"I don't underthtand what you mean."

"You don't know who that was? You don't know Prince Christoforo of Catania when you see him?"

She shook her head.

"I've never thet eyeth on him."

Henley slapped his sides and lay back, shaken with silent laughter.

"Guess this is the richest thing I've struck," he panted, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, "and you write home and say I said so. I'd make a par. of it if you weren't a friend. That . . . that . . . was the real gold-wire, yellow-label stuff—

vintage wine—oldest bin in the world. His folk were in their everlasting palaces when the Flood came. And you never knew!"

He lay back again and rocked gently from side to side. The girl flushed at his full-bodied merriment and frowned imperiously.

"I may be thupid, Mr. Henley," she said, "but I don't thee the joke."

"But you . . . you mistook . . ."

"I did nothing of the kind. If there *ith* a mithtake, you're making it. I know Kit Markham quite well: he wath thtaying at Deal for Tennith Week two yearth ago."

Her tone was so positive that Henley ceased to laugh. No shadow of doubt crossed his mind, for his sight was good, and the young man talking to Pat Kavanagh by the Restaurant steps was unquestionably the Prince of the previous evening. The colour of the eyes and hair, the moulding of the small, straight features were so distinctive that they could hardly be found at the same time on two different men.

"You're wrong, Miss Franklin," he asserted. "I was here last night when he arrived and I guess I'm not likely to mistake him. That's my stunt, you know."

"But he remembered me," the girl insisted. "And I tell you I've never met the Printh."

Henley shook his head with an air of superior wisdom.

"He saw it was a mistake all right, but he was too polite to let on."

"I'm afraid we mutht agree to differ."

Her patience was tried by her companion's aggressive certainty of tone. In her own mind she, too, harboured no doubt, but there was no disguising from herself that, if the impossible proved true, and she had in fact blundered, the first foolish mistake was made trebly ridiculous by her repeated denials. She wished that Henley would go away, or else that her own party would arrive. It was nearly two o'clock, and the lounge was emptying and losing its interest. One fractious man, with eyeglasses askew, sat by the door; another, long-legged, red-headed, cadaverous and bored, hovered a few yards from her chair; the remainder of the room was given over to comfortable matrons awaiting the arrival of their husbands from the War Office and reading advertisements for revolving rubber shoe-heels.

Once she jumped up as the door admitted a girl in green tailor-made coat and skirt; the face, however, was unfamiliar, and she sat down again with a sigh of hunger and disappointment. The new-comer did not advance into the lounge, but hesitated timidly in the entrance hall and finally took counsel of the commissionaire. A moment later a page-boy was caught and turned loose among the tables and chairs, plaintively crying, "Mr. Christopher Markham, Mr. Christopher Markham" in the high nasal voice that forty-four years of public education have cultivated to immortality in the elementary schools.

Miss Franklin turned to Henley with a smile of open triumph.

"What did I thay?" she demanded.

Henley raised his eyebrows, rolled the green cigar from right to left, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess that's his incog.," he hazarded, but the suggestion was put forward without enthusiasm.

The page-boy repeated his monotonous chant, and, to the surprise of both onlookers, Nap Fenwick rose from his chair, pulled his glasses straight and, sidling to the gangway, caught the boy by the shoulder. He walked diffidently, with one eye scanning the horizon for the head waiter.

"*That*'th not Kit Markham!" whispered Miss Franklin.

"Who is he, anyway?" asked Henley.

"I've never theen him before."

"Oh, he was here last night; he's one of the Prince's equerries, but I didn't know his name. The lanky fellow with the red hair is another. Christopher Markham. H'm. Guess you've got muddled some, Miss Franklin. You must have seen the pair of them 'way back at Deal and mixed 'em up."

The girl waited until Fenwick and the green-coated new-comer had passed into the Restaurant; then turned almost fiercely upon Henley.

"That'th *not* Kit Markham!" she repeated. "I've never thet eyeth on him before, tho I couldn't confuthe him with anyone elthe." She lowered her voice and nodded towards the orchestra's gallery. "And I know the other one ath well ath I know you. We played againtht each other in the themi-final, and he danthed with me theveral timeth at the Tennith Week Ball. He'th Chrithtopher Markham and he wath up at Oxford then, becauthe he athked me to come up and lunch with him."

"You didn't go?"

"No. War broke out."

"Ah!" Henley nodded sagaciously, but without conviction. "Well, he may have passed himself off to you as Markham for reasons of his own . . ."

"He's jutht ath likely to be pathing himthelf off now ath Printh Chrithtoforo for reathonth of hith own," retorted the girl. "Good-bye, I thee my people coming."

She jumped up and hurried towards the door, leaving Henley to twist his cigar from side to side and meditate profoundly. The girl's confident assurance had impressed him, but a considerable journalistic experience disposed him to a low view of feminine accuracy. He knew nothing of the girl save that she was engaged in war work somewhere near the hotel and frequently dropped in for luncheon or tea. It was his business to know a regular client, and he had sailed breezily into a slight acquaintance. About her morals he knew little and cared less. It might, for all he knew, be a favourite gambit with her to claim acquaintance with good-looking young men on the plea that they had retrieved a lost watch two years earlier at a seaside tennis tournament. The simplicity of the move captivated him; at worst it involved a stammering apology—"Silly mistake . . . extraordinary likeness . . ." at best a free luncheon, stalls for the theatre, and an explanation to irate but solaceable parents.

His reflections were interrupted by Osborne dropping into the vacant chair by his side. Here, if anywhere, was a man who could establish the Prince's identity beyond doubt.

"Say, have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Lionel Osborne?" he inquired. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

Osborne instinctively shrank into himself, murmuring:

"Not at all."

Henley looked at him with complete self-possession.

"Guess you don't place me, sir," he hazarded. "We met at the Deal tennis tournament two years ago—just before the war. July."

Osborne stared at him in unceremonious surprise.

"Never been to the God-forsaken place in my life," he answered. "I was big-game shootin' in July."

Henley stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"Extraordinary thing!" he murmured. "I

could have sworn it was you—you and young Kit Markham. Are you certain sure? You got into the final and were knocked out by Blane and Paliser; I mailed a story of it to my paper and I'd have put my shirt on it that I sent a picture of you. You'll be saying you don't know Kit Markham next!"

Osborne took out his case and lit a cigarette. He seemed fated to be sent into court with an unread brief—a course which he felt should be reserved for barristers; Fenwick had, as usual, under-instructed him; there had been vague orders to discover something of Henley's career; but the questions were all coming from Henley, and he had no idea how much information he was entitled to impart.

"I seem to know the name," he answered vaguely, with a feeling that diplomatists deserved more sympathy than they received.

"He was a dandy player!" exclaimed Henley, with enthusiasm. "What's happened to him, I wonder?"

"Soldierin', I suppose."

Henley nodded and held out his hand. He had gleaned sufficient information to clear his mind of any doubts set there by Miss Franklin.

"I'm sorry for my mistake," he said. "But I'm pleased to have met you again. Of course, I know your name because you were with the Prince. I hope to work an interview with him as soon as he's got any statement to make; and, though I've no sort of call on you, I'd take it kindly if you'd fix things for a meeting."

Osborne prepared for a diplomatic plunge.

"Don't you know him?" he asked, with feigned surprise. "I should have thought you must have run across him when he was an attaché in St. Petersburg, what?"

"He was never there."

Osborne's eyebrows rose deliberately.

"Surely!" he said. "Oh, you know best, of course. I've never been in Russia."

"Nor me," answered the journalist, adding rather lamely, "I happen to know because I've been reading up his history for my article."

"Then did you never meet him in Rome?"

"Never set foot in the place. London's the farthest east I've been. I came here from New Nottingham, Ohio, two or three years back, and here I've stayed. I don't want to quit, either; there's nothing much the matter with London."

He nodded and walked away towards the Restaurant. It was a few minutes after two, but neither General Kavanagh nor Lord Eynsham had arrived, and the Kitten and Pat were seated on a sofa, with their heads close together, talking in confidential undertones. Henley mounted the steps and looked about him for an empty table. As he did so, his eye was caught by Miss Franklin, who beckoned him to her.

"I wath quite right, Mr. Henley," she said, as he came up and distributed bows to her parents. "My father remembered Mr. Markham quite well when I pointed him out."

Augustus Franklin, K.C., popularly described as the only man at the Parliamentary Bar who was as wealthy as Mr. Augustus Franklin looked, nodded his concurrence.

"Not a jot or tittle of doubt," he said. "I found I'd been at Trinity with his uncle, though I'd largely forgotten the man. His father's Minister in Santa Katarina."

Henley looked from father to daughter.

"Say, this beats me," he confessed. "[illegible]ness, of course, he calls himself Markham when he wants to pass incog., and that don't explain the chat about his uncle at Trinity, anyway, or his father in Santa Katarina, unless he's troubled with an artistic temperament. That man outside is the Prince, though, for I've been talking to one of his equerries; what he called himself two years ago or why he did it, the good Lord alone knows, and you may tell him I said so."

"I think you'll find you're wrong and we're right," said the K.C., politely positive.

"[illegible] it don't matter a hill of beans, anyway," said Henley, with a friendly nod; and, ignoring the invitation of four empty tables, he returned to the lounge.

CHAPTER XII

A CHAPTER OF NO IMPORTANCE

MISS PATRICIA KAVANAGH was so engrossed in her magazine that she did not observe the Kitten until he reached her side and addressed her. Punctuality is the politeness of princes and furnishes occasion for pleasant *tête-à-têtes*, none the less agreeable for the uncertainty of their duration. The Kitten had arrived fully fifteen minutes before the time of his invitation.

"I'm dreadfully sorry daddy isn't here yet," she exclaimed, as he sat down beside her on the sofa.

"I was dreadfully afraid he might be," answered the Kitten easily. "Pat, there was something you wanted last night."

She blushed and lowered her eyes.

"I wanted to sink into the ground, sir. I wish you wouldn't remind me of it; I *did* apologize."

"And now you'll have to apologize again for calling me 'sir.' Only once have I asked a favour of you. . . . Sweet child, don't look so distressed! Call me what you like, do what you like. I only want to remind you of this."

He put his hand into a side pocket, brought out the watch, and slipped it on to her wrist. Then he lay back and smiled, as her eyes lit up with surprise and pleasure.

" But—but why are you doing this ? " she asked.

" Because you said nobody loved you enough to give you one."

" I may keep it ? "

" If you will promise always to wear it."

She looked into his eyes and nodded.

" It's just like the other," she said, endeavouring to decipher the monogram.

" It *is* the other," he explained. " I had to give you what you wanted."

" But the other was B. B.'s," she objected, in some doubt of her right to accept it.

" It was mine by purchase."

She looked at him in perplexity.

" I . . . I don't understand," she said. " I thought you picked this up . . ."

" For a song," he interrupted, with an easy wave of the hand.

" . . . At Victoria. . . ."

" In Regent Street," he corrected her.

" But—I wasn't *in* Regent Street yesterday."

" The bracelet was."

The girl looked at him and shook her head in bewilderment.

" It's so simple," he explained. " You were at Victoria, I was at Victoria. You didn't see me, I saw you. You didn't know me, I didn't know you. If you *had* seen me, perhaps you would not have wanted to know me. As I did see you, I quite certainly wanted to know you. I felt that to meet you was the only thing in life worth doing. I dreamed of sitting near you as I'm doing now, looking into your eyes, listening to your wonderful Irish voice . . ." He broke off and looked away; then resumed in a tone of banter, "A bolder man would have walked up to you without hesitation. I hesitated. A taxi bore you to this hotel, another took me to a goldsmith's in Regent Street. We met. I think you know the rest—all except the 'B. B.' I did not know your name, you see, so I christened you after a flower that presumes to copy the colour of your eyes. Some call it the wild hyacinth, others the bluebell. You will accept the watch?"

She was too much carried away by his words to face his eager eyes.

"It is your wish, sir?" she asked at length, demurely.

"If it is also yours."

"Your wishes are mine, sir."

He leaned towards her swiftly.

"Always, Pat? May I bring you home from the canteen to-night? Are your wishes always mine?"

His impetuous voice was mastering her, and she set herself to resist him as a man may fight against the drowsy scent of an anæsthetic.

"Always, sir," she answered lightly, "so long as

Prince Christoforo does me the honour of accepting my father's hospitality."

The Kitten's eager brown eyes became charged with disappointment.

" If I weren't a Prince, Pat ? " he inquired. " If I were just an ordinary man . . ."

She looked swiftly into his face and as swiftly lowered her eyes.

" To me—you would never seem just an ordinary man, sir."

" Yet when we met last night . . ."

She shook her head.

" I didn't know you were a Prince, but I did know . . ."

" If my name were Christopher Brown, Smith, Jones ? " he interrupted excitedly.

" But it isn't, sir," she answered, shaking her head again. There was a pause, and her fingers played with the bracelet on her wrist. " It is very kind of you to give me this."

The Kitten fidgeted impatiently in his corner. Pat's cheeks were still flushed, but he felt that the spell was broken.

" You know why I gave you that ? " he asked.

" I'm afraid it was because I admired it so unblushingly."

" But—I thought I told you the reason. Have you forgotten already ? "

She faced him without timidity or embarrassment.

" Have *you* forgotten nothing, sir ? " she asked.

The Kitten smiled a little bitterly at this reminder of his false rank. The correction had been delicately administered, but he could not help admiring the spirit of the girl in administering it.

"Must I never allude to this subject again?" he asked. "The world is full of uncertainties. If I ever ceased to be a Prince, I should like to resume this conversation."

Her face grew suddenly wistful.

"Your wishes are always mine, sir," she told him, and the Kitten had to leave the subject at that.

General Kavanagh on his arrival was as profuse with apologies as his guest was gracious in waving them away. To a philosopher, twenty minutes' conversation with Pat Kavanagh was positive achievement—a rose-hued memory and a bracing consolation for a man who might at any moment be made the subject of a distressing public exposure. The Kitten entered the Restaurant by his host's side and walked imperturbably to a flower-laden table in an embrasure by the window. Offered the choice of seats, he glanced quickly round the room and selected a chair facing the window and overlooking Piccadilly and the Green Park. Apart from the Franklins, who were half-way through their luncheon when he came in, there was present as yet no one that he knew, but a momentary prudence suggested to him the wisdom of sitting with his back to the other tables. The General and his daughter sat on either side of him, with Lord Eynsham backing the window and facing the room.

From the Kitten's point of view the luncheon was a long triumphal progress. By way of consolidating an insecure position he boldly engaged Lord Eynsham in an exchange of diplomatic reminiscences, disinterring dead scandals and forgotten names that had once been whispered excitedly from one embassy to another.

"They were happy days," said the old man ruminatively. "Are you acquainted with my successor, I wonder, sir?"

"Hardly at all. The Diplomatic is a disappointing service, my lord," said the Kitten sententiously. "No sooner is a friendship made than one or other of the friends is transferred to the other end of the world. I fear you would scarcely recognize your old Embassy now."

Lord Eynsham nodded in acquiescence.

"I have had to retire," he said. "Wimberley is in Tokio, Markham in Santa Katarina."

"Markham had a son," said the Kitten, with a visible effort of memory. "A man about my own age. Do you know what has happened to him?"

"Since they left Rome I have never set eyes on him. Dear me, yes! He must be grown up by now. I remember him as a slip of a boy in a white suit. No, I don't suppose I should recognize him if I saw him."

The Kitten turned and addressed a question on the course of the war to General Kavanagh. From his reading of the " New Arabian Nights," on which he was modelling himself shamelessly, he remembered that princes were credited with a deep knowledge of public questions, a deeper curiosity and desire for information, and—more than anything else—a faculty for conversing easily on all subjects. The General opened in non-committal fashion on the bold, black-and-white lines of the war's conduct. For a time the Kitten listened politely, but, as the meal went on, and the excitement of successfully playing a part infected his blood, he reversed the positions and undertook to instruct the General on many matters that had never officially been reported to the War Office. The secret history of the Staff bungling at Ste. Marie-la-Fleuve, the incredible infantry advance at Renne, were told deferentially but with pitilessly well-supported details and a luxuriance of names and personal characteristics.

" If I may say so, sir," the General observed, with frank but embarrassed admiration, " you might have been present yourself."

The Kitten shrugged his shoulders in deprecation.

" One hands on these stories for what they are worth," he said. " You are the best judge whether they are true."

" It is hard to form an impartial opinion," answered the General. " A dispatch is always coloured by the prepossessions of the man who writes it, the man who was responsible for arranging the movement he is describing."

"And perhaps defending," the Kitten interrupted, with a sagacious nod.

For ten minutes the dining-room of the Semiramis Hotel became a Palace of Truth and, in the shocked hearing of a gold-laced, red-tabbed General of the Staff, Lieutenant Christopher Markham—intermittently Prince Christoforo of Catania—made known his private judgement on every superior officer with whom he had come in contact. As he explained afterwards in telling the story to Nap Fenwick, "If I'd lost an opportunity like that, I should have been damned in this world and the next, and uncle George would never have spoken to me again."

Three o'clock had struck, and the waiters were removing the liqueurs, before the Kitten had concluded his pious work.

"But I fear I am keeping you, General," he said, as his host glanced furtively at his watch. "I know you are not master of your own time, and if you feel you ought to be getting back to the War Office . . ."

He pushed back his chair, and the others rose to their feet.

"You are very considerate, sir," said the General. "If I lose an hour in the middle of the day, it takes me three hours at night to catch it up. As it is, I'm afraid to think how late I shall be in getting home.

I probably have to leave town for a short time this afternoon."

The Kitten had hardly listened to the opening words, but the end of the sentence made him prick up his ears.

"I do not know," he said, "whether I shall have another opportunity of seeing you again before I leave England. I wonder whether you will delegate to me the privilege of escorting Miss Kavanagh home to-night? Perhaps you will be back then and I shall be able to take my leave of you all."

The General was put momentarily out of countenance by the unexpectedness of the proposal.

"Sir, I feel that this is a needless trespass on your good-nature," he began.

"The word I used was 'privilege,' General," said the Kitten, with a smile.

"You are kind enough to regard it in that light, sir. . . ."

"And you will not refuse me your permission?" The Kitten turned to the girl. "Miss Kavanagh, have I your leave to call for you at Victoria to-morrow morning at one o'clock?"

"If it is your wish, sir," she murmured, in a voice too low for her father to hear.

He sprang to his feet, with a happy smile.

"I shall not be late," he said. "Good-bye, General, until to-night, and my best thanks to you for your kindness to a lonely sojourner Lord

Eynsham, good-bye. Miss Kavanagh, are you too busy to help me finish my cigar in the lounge?"

In high good humour he faced the room and prepared to lead the way by General Kavanagh's side to the door. Their luncheon had not begun until after two, and the big dining-room was now almost a desolation in white and gold. At the next table, however, a solitary figure sat stirring his coffee and sucking at a newly lit cigar. His back was turned to the passage between the tables, but the Kitten, glancing idly down, caught sight of a black beard surmounted by a cheerful red face. He was so much taken by surprise that he stopped short and collided with Lord Eynsham.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" inquired the General, drowning the old man's apologies.

"I—I dropped my cigar," the Kitten answered, as he bent down and picked it up with a trembling hand.

Two minutes later he was seated with Pat Kavanagh on a sofa in the lounge. The most consistent of Nap Fenwick's charges against him was that he was temperamentally incapable of thinking of more than one thing at a time. He had arrived early to talk alone with the girl, as all men talk to one woman once in their lives—and some more than one. He had forgotten that he was still masquerading, until reminded by his companion, and thereafter conversation had languished. With the arrival of General Kavanagh he played his part whole-heartedly, anxious only to escape detection. The near presence of Henley, by design or coincidence, brought disquiet and a shock of surprise from which he was slow to recover; he told himself, as he had told Fenwick a dozen times, that there was nothing in Legrange's fears or his own theories, but an obstinate, hollow apprehension suggested that the masquerade might have a tragic side and that he was trifling with unknown forces.

The girl looked wonderingly at his troubled face and was almost glad that he smoked and brooded without speaking. He had talked so much during the meal that her own silence had passed unnoticed, but she was conscious of a certain shrinking when he invited her to sit with him alone or proposed himself as her escort. If he went out of her life as he had entered it, handsome, debonair, and eternally young, she felt that she would have a memory to cherish that nothing could stale or wither. A word of needless gallantry would dispel the dream, and he had shown that such words rose to his lips without effort.

An inch of grey cigar-ash fell and scattered over his knee. He brushed it away, and the movement seemed to rouse him from his meditation.

" I want to say something to you, Pat," he began, looking at her a little timidly. " I tried to say it yesterday evening when you bade me good night. I tried to say it again to-day before lunch." He sighed. " It was no good; I couldn't do it."

She looked away, and her fingers played with the fastening of her watch.

" You know I shall like to hear it ? " she asked.

He laughed uneasily.

" I don't know that you will, Pat."

She turned quickly and touched his sleeve with the tips of her fingers.

" Then don't say it, sir," she begged. " You've been so ripping—I mean, well, that's what I *do* mean ; I feel as if I were living in a dream, and, if you say anything to spoil it . . ."

She broke off and besought him with her eyes.

" I must say it, Pat," he answered. " You see, I'm going away in a few days' time and I may never come back. I couldn't stand your thinking me something that I'm not."

Her brows contracted for a moment, but the words conveyed nothing to her.

" You've been—a delightful friend," she told him.

" No more ? "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" And no less ? " he pursued. " We can always be friends, Pat, if you insist on stopping there ; shall we ever be less ? "

" I hope not, sir."

He threw away the end of his cigar and turned to look her squarely in the face.

" If I tell you a secret, Pat," he said, " will you promise not to tell anyone ? "

She bowed her head slowly.

"On your honour? And you will promise not to be angry with me?"

"I can't say till I know," she answered, with a laugh.

"Well, do your best to be charitable at all events. Did you hear me talking to Lord Eynsham about a man called Markham, who was First Secretary at the Embassy?"

"In Rome?"

"Yes." The Kitten hesitated and coloured slightly under the steady gaze of her blue eyes. "He was—my father, Pat."

CHAPTER XIII

EXIT PRINCE CHRISTOFORO

"YOUR father?"

Pat Kavanagh echoed the words without understanding. An English girl of the same age would have leaped nimbly to an assumption of a scandalous intimacy between the Princess Amelia and Sir Greville Markham, one time First Secretary in Rome and now Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Santa Katarina.

"How could he be?" she went on.

The Kitten plunged desperately into his explanation.

"Pat, I'm no more a prince than you are," he said. "I'm a lieutenant in His Majesty's army relegated to the congenial task of lobbing high explosive shells into Bosche trenches, and at the present time a quarter way through ninety-six hours' varied but agreeable leave."

"But . . ."

The word died on her lips, and at the same time comprehension was reflected in her eyes, and the Kitten read his sentence. Nothing that he could say would soften that stony, pitiless look of condemnation ; yet, as she struggled for words, he broke into an eager, unsubstantial defence.

"It's a long, absurd story," he began, with an apologetic and placating smile. "I came here in morning dress to find you, and, of course, they wouldn't have let me into the Restaurant. As I could speak Italian, some one suggested I should pretend to be Prince Christoforo, to spoof the head waiter. On my honour, Pat, it wasn't going further than that, but a prize fool called Armitage got the orchestra to play the Italian National Anthem, and every soul in the dining-room was spoofed, including poor old Eynsham. That's the whole story . . ."

"The whole story ? And you let me think . . ."

"Be fair, Pat," he interrupted. "I never told you who I was or who I wasn't. Eynsham butted in and stood to attention like a stuck pig . . ." He covered his face with his hands. "And I lost my nerve. Everybody in the lounge was staring, and I couldn't face the scene he'd have made. Later on I wanted to tell you, but I knew your guv'nor would never have forgiven me . . . and I wanted to meet you again."

She sat very still, with pink cheeks and eyes bright with anger.

"So you went on 'spoofing' him instead, as you call it," she exclaimed. "You let a General, a man old enough to be your father, say 'sir' to a puppy of a lieutenant; you let Lord Eynsham, who's old enough to be your grandfather, hang about for leave to sit down; you made me wish to die with shame for the way I'd spoken to you; you let my father apologize—before me—for my bad manners . . ."

"I said there was nothing to forgive," he corrected her, but the interruption passed unheeded.

"You little . . ." The word, whatever it was, refused to come. "It's the most outrageous . . ."

"Patsy, don't be angry with me!" he begged contritely, laying his hand on her wrist. "You might never have known, I need never have told you, only I thought it was the right thing to do."

Indignantly she brushed away his hand.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "And don't call me Patsy! I never want to see you or speak to you again. Here's your watch . . ."

He slipped his hands behind his back and shook his head.

"You promised you would wear it—always."

The words gave pause to her angry fingers.

"You hold me to that promise?" she demanded.

"Your wishes . . . Yes, I do, Miss Kavanagh. I cannot forget you, and I don't choose that you should forget me."

She bowed quickly, with lips set in a determined scarlet line; then silently held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Markham."

He smiled with whimsical regret. So many of his romances had ended more or less in this way, but the others had not mattered.

In deference or anger he found her equally irresistible and, as an artist in emotion, he would have given much to make her repeat, " Ye hould me to thet promuss ? "

" Friends. Nothing more. Nothing less," he murmured. " I marvel at my own moderation, Miss Kavanagh ; I am always handicapped by the remnants of decent feelings . . ."

" I am not interested, Mr. Markham."

He ignored the interruption.

" All the same, as you could never be more than friends with a prince, and, as I'm not a prince . . ."

She rose from the sofa and picked up her gloves.

" Now you seem to be nothing but a liar."

The Kitten bowed.

" Good-bye, Miss Kavanagh," he said. " I have to thank you for—a great deal."

He looked slowly round the lounge before taking farewell of it for the last time. The slackest season of the day had settled on the hotel ; in the Restaurant waiters in shirt sleeves were laying the tables for dinner ; a page-boy was tidying papers, straightening antimacassars, and sweeping up cigar bands and match-ends in the deserted lounge ; the American Bar was empty, and the orchestra's gallery occupied only by a half-hidden cashier reading an afternoon edition of the " Night Watchman." In an hour there would be tea, music, a rustle of women's clothes, the pungent smell of cigarettes, and the penetrating voices of the educated English. Now the only visitor beside Pat Kavanagh and the Kitten was an old man so shabbily dressed that the commissionaire at the door had assumed him to be an Irish Representative Peer. He shuffled from table to table, resting a hand on each, and gazing about him, while a page-boy ambled towards the Restaurant steps drumming his fingers against a salver and monotonously droning: "Mr. Homer P. Henley, Mr. Homer P. Henley."

The name and its associations were a last exasperation to the Kitten. He bowed to his companion and felt in his pocket for his cloak-room ticket.

"I suppose you don't think it's worth while apologizing," she inquired ironically, "before you go?"

The Kitten was so dejected that her tone was wasted on him.

"With all my heart and soul, Miss Kavanagh, if it's going to do any good. We seemed to have got beyond that somehow."

"There's no harm in trying."

Something in her voice suggested to him that she was relenting. He held out both hands to her, and she took them in her own for a moment.

"I apologize in all sincerity," he said, "and I ask to be forgiven."

He was conscious of a barely perceptible pressure on his hands before she dropped them.

"Now go to Lord Eynsham's room," she whispered breathlessly. "You'll find him in—I must do what I can with daddy . . ."

He cut her short with a gesture.

"It's utterly impossible," he said. "In good time I'll apologize to them both . . ."

"You must do it now."

"I can't. For the present no one else must know. . . ."

"If you don't tell him, I shall."

"You promised to keep it a secret," he reminded her. "Oh, it's no good, I can't explain. It isn't that I particularly funk meeting your guv'nor. I try to take my medicine without screwing up my face—but the secret isn't mine. I started the whole thing as a joke, but it's grim earnest now, and nobody must know for the present that I'm not the Prince. I can't put it more clearly than that, you must accept my word that it *is* so . . ."

The terms had been offered and rejected, and her eyes became once more disdainful and unforgiving.

"You seem to attach some importance to your word!" she cried.

The Kitten was preparing a last appeal, but Pat Kavanagh was gone. Hurrying in pursuit, he overtook her opposite the Restaurant steps, as Henley entered the lounge convoyed by the page-boy.

"Mayn't I come to-night, as we arranged?" he asked.

The girl shook her head. It required all her strength of will to restrain her from crying.

"*Please*, Pat!" he whispered.

"I'm afraid it would be waste of trouble," she answered over her shoulder in a courageously level voice.

As the Kitten turned despondently away and walked through the lounge to the cloak-room, Mr. Homer P. Henley approached the old man in the shabby clothes, who was seated by a table, breathing on to a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and polishing them with a coloured silk handkerchief.

"I'm Homer P. Henley," he said. "Guess you're the one that wanted to see me. May I ask your name and business anyway?"

The old man put on his spectacles and studied the speaker's face.

"I represent the Moravian Brotherhood," he explained, in a fluting voice. "The Moravian Brotherhood. We are appealing for funds . . ." He paused and produced a crumpled half-sheet of note-paper from a pocket of his be-dropped waistcoat. "For funds. I thought that, if your influential paper . . ."

Henley leaned forward and straightened out the crumpled sheet. It contained four words in printed capitals:

"THERE WAS NOTHING THERE."

"And how much does your old Brotherhood intend to pay?" he inquired in a clear, truculent voice, calculated to reach every one in the scantily populated lounge; then, taking out a pencil and adding a few words, he handed back the paper. "That's our rock-bottom rate for philanthropy stunts."

The old man read, also in capitals:

"I TOLD YOU NOT TO COME HERE, SILAS."

"We hoped you would publish it without payment," he mumbled, "without payment. It is so short."

Henley took a second look at the paper and read:

"I COULD NOT WAIT. WHAT NEXT?"

"We don't run the 'New Nottingham Times' for our health," he said. "See here, those are our rates, but it's worth no man's while to pay 'em and then fool about with an ad. like that. You can tell old man Huss I said so. If you want to touch the dollars . . ."

He took out his pencil and printed on the back of the paper: "YOU SAW HIM GO OUT, BUT I CAN'T SWEAR HE'S OUR MAN. GO AND ASCERTAIN. I'LL DO THE REST, BUT YOU MUST REPORT WITHIN AN HOUR. I SHALL PLAY CHESS AFTER TEA."

"There," he said. "That's a dandy notice, and, as it's for a charity stunt, I don't charge a dime for writing it. You light out home and think it up. It'll pay you a thousand times over."

The old man glanced at the paper, shrugged his shoulders and shuffled out of the lounge. Henley yawned and sent a waiter to fetch "that poison I mostly drink about now," hinting by means of a wink that he proposed to evade the rigours of the licensing restrictions.

"Say, d'you know the old boy who just went out?" he inquired, when the drink appeared. "Got creeping religion, I guess, and thinks I ought to fill my London letter with free ads. for cheap salvation. And I'm not the advertisement tout, anyway."

He emptied his tumbler, lit a cigar, and walked into Piccadilly, where he hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to take him to the Alcazar Café. As he passed Bath House he caught a glimpse of the Moravian Brotherhood's alleged representative creeping along by the wall; at the corner of Stratton Street he saw the Kitten moodily trudging eastward and digging savagely at the pavement with his cane. After that, he leaned back and took no interest in his surroundings until the taxi drew up in Regent Street.

A cold drizzle, descending on face and neck, recalled the Kitten to sublunary interests, and, ignoring solicitous cabmen who slowed down by the kerb, he mechanically crossed the road by Devonshire House and was feeling his way through the weather-bound wanderers under the colonnade of the Ritz, when a hand dropped heavily on to his shoulder.

"The very man I've been looking for!" said a voice.

He glanced up abstractedly to find Armitage facing him.

"Hallo!" he responded listlessly.

Armitage took his arm with a fine air of mystery and led him into the hotel, where he selected a remote table and ordered tea.

"First of all," he began, "did it go off all right? I couldn't make out what had happened to you all; there's no one at the flat, and no sign of Lionel or Nap Fenwick. I was getting a bit anxious. Did you carry it off again?"

The Kitten eyed him with sombre rage.

"I've done it in!" he whispered fiercely. "Everything went wrong. I gave myself away—needlessly, futilely . . ."

He broke off in disgust, and Armitage, nodding sympathetically, put tactful questions until the whole story had been extracted.

"But you didn't give yourself away to anyone but Miss Kavanagh?" he persisted, as the Kitten's narrative, spluttering like a pocketful of damp squibs, flickered to extinction.

"My God, wasn't that enough?" was the explosive rejoinder. "No one else mattered. Who else could I have told?"

"Henley, for one."

The Kitten pushed back his chair in disgust and started towards the door. Armitage restrained him until the bill was paid; then linked arms and threaded a way through the quickly filling lounge.

"Look here, old man," he began sympathetically, "you seem to have got cold feet. Now, there are all kinds of women in London ; why not try some one else ? The girl who's been writing to you, for instance ? "

" You're not treating this seriously ! " exclaimed the Kitten.

" I assure you I am, but you must face facts. Point one, she won't see you again ; point two, you've got three whole days more ; point three, you must do something. Dine with me in the Carlton Grill Room and go on to the Palace."

The Kitten shook his head mournfully.

" I should have no appetite," he said.

" I'll give you a cocktail first."

" A Soul's Ruin ? " asked the Kitten, dropping his other-world voice for the moment and almost perceptibly brightening.

" If you like."

" In a tumbler ? "

" Oh, of course," answered Armitage in the shocked tone that an Anglican bishop might adopt if pressed to state whether he believed the Thirty-Nine Articles.

" What time can we get it under these beastly new rules ? " asked the Kitten as they reached the door.

" Six-thirty," said Armitage, with the air of one who has tried earlier and failed.

" We'd better be there at six-twenty to give the order."

Leaving the Ritz, they walked along Piccadilly to the top of St. James' Street. They were turning south, when an old man, who had been peering bewilderedly up at the street names at the corner, asked them to direct him to the 1900 Club.

"Pickering Court, last entry to the left at the bottom," answered Armitage, and the old man thanked him and shuffled slowly along in their wake. "Well, I shall turn off here," he went on as they reached Jermyn Street. "Six-twenty and don't be late. Dress or not, as you like. By the way, that reminds me. When I stopped you in Piccadilly I meant to tell you that it was about time to drop this Prince stunt. I've heard from the Admiralty that Channel sailings have been resumed, and you may drop across the real man at any moment. You'd better tell Nap."

"I wish to God they'd been resumed twenty-four hours earlier," said the Kitten, with a return of his former despondency.

Then he waved a hand to Armitage and strolled down to the door of Osborne's flat. The old man dawdled behind him, staring into the shops and straying between the feet of the passers-by, until the door slammed. Then he hailed a taxi and drove to the Alcazar Café.

CHAPTER XIV

LIMITED LIABILITY CRIME

NAP FENWICK'S personality was such that it impressed itself not only on his neighbours but on his surroundings. When the Kitten threw open the library door of Osborne's flat, he found Fenwick resting his head on his hand, scowling and drawing ill-balanced Maltese crosses on the blotting-pad; Osborne sat silent and embarrassed, watching him with terrified fascination, and the room itself was gloomy and sulphurous, lit by a dying fire and a reading-lamp so placed that no one but Fenwick could profit by its rays.

" Cheer-o, everybody," said the Kitten morosely, turning on all the lights, kicking the door shut behind him and dropping into a chair by the fire. " Are you writing a pamphlet on land surveying in Rhodesia, Nap ? "

Osborne rose silently, switched off the extra lights and returned to his place.

" He's thinkin' out a plan," he whispered. " Don't disturb him. The lunch wasn't much of a success, and he's a bit ratty."

" He usually is," said the Kitten, with loud

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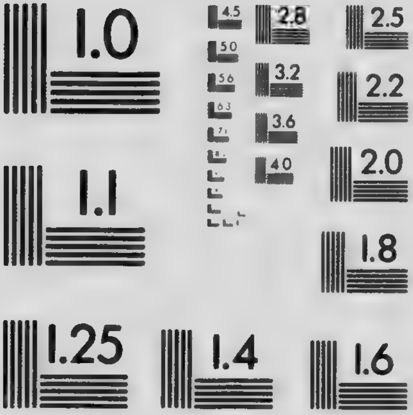

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distinctness. "Mine wasn't a success either, but I don't get quarrelsome about it. How did you get on? I forget what your stunt was."

"Oh, I was supposed to be findin' out if Henley was really a journalist or a spy. I think I did it rather well. I put some leadin' questions and found that the feller'd never set foot in Italy or Russia, so the whole of Legrange's case falls to the ground, what? Nap thinks, though . . ."

Fenwick, however, preferred to give his criticism in his own words.

"You've come back with just such information as he chose to give you. That wasn't what you were sent there for. What happened to you, Kitten?"

Fully and acidly the Kitten told his tale, from the embarrassing chance encounter with Miss Franklin to his dismissal at the hands of Pat Kavanagh.

"But I said you were not to give yourself away to *any*one," Fenwick interrupted, as the story neared its end.

"I dare say you did, but I had to tell Pat. It's a private matter between her and myself."

"It's enough to throw my whole plan out!" exclaimed Fenwick irritably.

"Oh, your plan's in the cart anyhow. Channel sailings are resumed, and with any luck the Prince is in London now."

He described his meeting with Armitage, while

Fenwick made occasional notes on the blotting-paper; then Osborne was taken through his evidence a second time, scattered and seemingly irrelevant questions were put to them both, and a long silence followed. For ten minutes Nap Fenwick sat with both hands pressed to his temples, staring at the notes; Osborne was by now schooled to patience, but the Kitten from time to time plunged half-way into a question, to be promptly quelled by a rasping, "Shut up!" At last the oracle spoke.

"We're exactly where we were this morning," he observed. "Henley's a trifle worse off. We shall therefore go on where we left off this morning."

"But . . ."

Nap Fenwick raised a silencing hand.

"What *I*'ve got to tell you is worth hearing, Osborne. Are you sure you can say the same? You see, I've taken the trouble to think this out. Well, our first duty was to find out who and what Henley was, with a view to stamping on him before he could bite, if he was the spy Legrange thought him to be. We've failed to identify him; we can take no summary action, we can only watch carefully and try to get in first blow. Now, if Henley's not a spy, there's nothing more to be done. I'm going to assume he is. I'm going to give him a chance of striking, and I'm going to stand by with a stick for the first hint of a movement. He must have his chance soon, for, the moment the Prince comes, we have to disappear; and we mustn't let him find out his mistake and have first blow at the Prince. Therefore I propose to hunt him to-night; the Kitten will act as decoy . . ."

"Sorry, I'm dining out," interrupted the Kitten.

Fenwick ploughed through the objection with the deaf inattention to blandishments observable in a second-hand clothier valuing a cast-off wardrobe.

"The Kitten will act as decoy," he repeated. "I will give you all details later. Osborne and I shall then stalk Henley. The odds will be on our side, for we shall expect him and he won't expect us, and we shall be certain of our man, and he won't be certain of his. That's his weak point."

He paused in the hope that a question would be put, but the others had learned their lesson.

"Never forget," he went on, "that Henley doesn't know which hare he's hunting. He did—or thought he did—till lunch-time to-day; then Miss Franklin set up a doubt in his mind. You say you met her at Deal, Kitten; well, when he hinted that he'd seen you and Osborne playing in the Deal Tournament, he showed his doubt. If he saw or heard me answering to the name of Markham, when your appalling young friend arrived for lunch, that must have weakened his doubt, but increased his confusion. On the other hand, you were lunching with Eynsham, and that diminishes the doubt further. As I read it, the question in his mind is whether the man whom Miss Franklin addressed is the same man or only a double of the Prince who dined at the Semiramis last night. How can he settle the point? He can't." He stopped abruptly, crossed the room, raised the blind, and looked down into the darkened street. "No, he's not there, though he well might be. It was known last night that the Prince was staying here, and, if he can follow you from here to a suitable place, it will be worth his while to strike—on chance. If he's a bold man, he'll forget the doubt and strike hard; if he's cautious, he'll remember it and try to strike without killing. It's limited liability assassination both sides. All this explains why we have to go on where we left off this morning; the possibility of the Prince's arrival necessitates our acting at once. Now, Kitten, when you arranged to call for Miss Kavanagh at the canteen, had Henley any means of overhearing the arrangement?"

"He was at the next table; he *might* have overheard our conversation."

"Poor devil!" murmured Fenwick, and in his normal voice, "then he's been given fair warning of time and place, if he cares to profit by the darkened streets. If he gets into ambush anywhere between Victoria and the Semiramis . . ."

"He won't meet me," interrupted the Kitten, looking up at the clock and jumping to his feet. "I suppose this sort of thing amuses you, Nap; the 'Queen-to-move-and-mate-in-three' stunt. Frankly, though, I've had enough of it; it's all very well for Legrange, he's paid to collect mares' nests, and I suppose you can do it for a hobby—I remember uncle George used to collect stamps at one time—but you mustn't expect other people to rot up their leave for you. I must go and get ready for dinner. If it hadn't been for this foolery, I might be dining at the Semiramis to-night."

Fenwick resented the tone of patronizing disparagement coming on top of what he considered a creditable piece of constructive reasoning.

"If you thought more of the Prince, Kitten," he suggested acidly, "and less of your amours . . ."

"This wasn't an amour," came an indignant interruption. "It was a romance."

"My dear young friend, the difference between a romance and an amour is the difference between a menu and a dinner."

The Kitten assumed an expression of disgust and retired to his bedroom. Osborne composed himself for slumber, and Nap Fenwick, placing his watch on the table before him, took a fresh sheet of blotting-paper and began to sketch a rough map. He had not been at work for more than ten minutes, when the bell of the telephone rang, and Osborne crossed the room and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!" he drawled. "Yes—yes. Speakin'—who? The Prince?" He looked quickly round, to find Fenwick straightening himself in his chair. "Who's it speakin', please? Who? Can't hear. General *who*? Would you mind spellin' it? K for Kensington, yes. Oh, General Kavanagh!

Sorry! Yes, he's dressin' for dinner; d'you want to speak to him? Certainly, I will." There was a silence of some moments while Osborne wrote out a message. "Oh, I'm sure he meant it. Is that all? I'll give it him at once. Good-bye."

He replaced the receiver, opened the door, and shouted for the Kitten.

"What did he want?" Nap Fenwick inquired.

Osborne threw him the sheet of paper.

"Rang up from the War Office to know if the Kitten really intends to fetch his daughter home to-night. . . . Here, Kitten, love's young dream's runnin' smoothly at last, what? Kavanagh says, if it's any trouble to you, he'll meet the girl himself; he doesn't like her comin' home alone. I told him you were dead serious."

The Kitten snatched the paper from Fenwick's hand.

"Serious?" he echoed.

"I suppose he thought it was just the princely manner."

The Kitten double-shuffled round the room, discharged a cushion with passionless accuracy at his friend's head, plucked an antimacassar from one of the arm-chairs, and, rolling it into a ball, flung it at Fenwick.

"It's going to be quite a bright little leave after all," he predicted, pulling up in front of a mirror and beginning to tie a silk scarf round his neck.

Fenwick returned the antimacassar to its place, extricated his glasses from a tangle of reading-lamp, blotting-paper and inkstand, and took control of the position.

" You're really going to meet her ? " he inquired. The Kitten did not trouble himself with so idle a question. " Have you thought what you're going to say to her ? "

" I'm going to propose."

" You're going to get a healthy and well-merited snub," suggested Fenwick. " She gives you notice to quit in the afternoon. . . ."

" Ah, but her father's made that all right," interrupted the Kitten, putting his arms into the sleeves of his overcoat. " My position's perfectly regular."

" She doesn't know anything about that. She doesn't expect you, she doesn't want you. . . . No, you never *do* think of anything. Well, when she sets eyes on you, she'll turn on her heel and walk in the opposite direction. Had you thought of that ? "

The Kitten put his hat on at an angle and looked doubtfully at a pair of rather soiled wash-leather gloves.

" For bright, cheerful company give me Nap Fenwick ! " he observed at large. " You're a gloomy swine, Nap."

" Vulgar abuse is a poor substitute for argument," answered Fenwick, with dignity.

" It'll all come right ! "

" Nothing comes right unless you arrange it beforehand. First of all, let's hear where you're meeting her and at what time. Where are you dining, and what are you going to do afterwards . . .?"

But the Kitten was no longer in the room. Daunted by the pitiless rain of questions, he had put his fingers to his ears and bolted out with a muttered "God in heaven!" Immediately and with such speed as his peculiar sidling walk permitted, Fenwick jumped up and gave chase. Osborne half rose in his chair and was preparing to follow, when he recollected that no orders had been given and that it was now his duty to await orders.

Two minutes later Nap Fenwick returned, breathless and alone, but still purposeful.

"Get your coat and hat!" he said, hurrying across to his bedroom.

"What's up?" asked Osborne.

"We've got to draw every restaurant in London till we find the little beast—every theatre and music-hall too, if need be. Impetuous little brute! He's about as reliable as a lady novelist. Hurry up, man! There's no time to lose!"

But Osborne was beginning to show flickering signs of suppressed revolt.

"I'm not goin' to move till I know what it's all about," he said. "Leave the poor devil in peace, Nap! He's only a kid, and not half a bad kid at that."

Fenwick turned upon him hotly.

"You're almost as bad as he is!" he exclaimed. "I'd got the plan half worked out, and the finishing touch came straight from heaven. You couldn't have a finer opportunity! Some time—I don't know when, damn him! and I don't know where—but some time to-night the Kitten's going to Victoria to meet this girl. He'll go alone through darkened streets and a deserted, pitch-black Park, and, if Henley wants his chance, he's got it. My Lord! the job was being done for us! And then this young fool rushes away without waiting for orders! We must scour London till we've discovered him and found when he's to be there and told him which way to go."

He was turning again to the door, but Osborne caught his arm and restrained him.

"There's nothin' doin'," he declared very deliberately, shaking his head in the manner of one whose obstinacy is not the weaker for being slow to rouse.

"You're going to leave me in the lurch?"

"Oh, 'lurch' be damned. This is a mare's nest, Nap; the Kitten was quite right."

"I hope you'll continue to think so to-morrow, if you read that he's been found with a knife in his back."

Osborne laughed in open derision. The melodramatic tone had been a little forced.

"If you leave things where they are," he said, "nobody'll come to any harm. I'm not cut out for spyin' and stalkin' and secret service generally and I'm not goin' to mix myself up in this Prince business any longer. If the Kitten's found with a knife in his back, it'll be because you made him a decoy."

Fenwick sighed with the patient resignation of one whose fate compels him always to associate with the half-witted.

"I'm not making him anything," he said. "I want to warn him, and I want you to stand by and help to ward off the attack. Henley *knows* he's going there; he heard them arranging it at lunch."

Osborne was impressed, for all his talk of mares' nests. He even started reluctantly to the door, when a sudden objection presented itself to his mind.

"That's all very well, Nap," he said. "But, if Henley heard the original arrangement, it's long odds he heard it bein' cancelled. Accordin' to the Kitten, he was close by them in the lounge."

Fenwick nodded composedly. He had hardly credited his friend with sufficient acumen to take such a point, but he was ready with a counter objection. Osborne studied his face like a chess player who has cried "check!"

"Have you ever met Kavanagh?" asked Fenwick quietly.

"No. And don't much want to."

"Then, so far as voices go, the man who just spoke to you might have been Little Tich or the Bishop of London? You wouldn't go into court and swear it was Kavanagh?"

"He *said* he was Kavanagh," Osborne answered weakly.

"I should say *I* was Kavanagh, if it suited my purpose," Fenwick retorted. "So, perhaps, would Henley."

He stood for a moment watching the effect of his words, then laid his fingers on the handle of the door.

"He wouldn't have the nerve," said Osborne, after a pause. "Suppose the Kitten had answered the telephone, what? He'd have fallen into his own trap."

Fenwick snorted contemptuously.

"You can't arrest a suspicious voice," he said. "He's not a child. He'd have scrapped that plan and started another. I don't say it *was* Henley speaking, but by going round to the Semiramis we can find out whether it was Kavanagh, and, if it wasn't Kavanagh, we must lay our plans and warn the Kitten, if you ever want to see him alive again"

CHAPTER XV

ENTER PRINCE CHRISTOFORO

THERE were few people in the lounge of the Semiramis Hotel when Nap Fenwick and Osborne arrived. Half a dozen youthful second lieutenants languidly sipped cocktails and glanced alternately at their wrist-watches and at the revolving glass doors; three or four short-skirted girls in morning dress lay delicately back in the big green morocco-covered arm-chairs, studying their reflections in the mirrored backs of their vanity-bags and furtively adding a dab of powder wherever their skin seemed unprotected; behind a screen of palms a very small midshipman turned the pages of the "Sporting and Dramatic." He was waiting for his mother and feared that she would attempt to kiss him publicly.

The only person who affected indifference alike to his personal appearance and to the movements of his neighbours was a middle-aged man of military build with a square-bridged nose and a cavalry moustache; on his knees lay a midday edition of the "Pall Mall Gazette," open at the City article;

his hands were clasped over his stomach, and he seemed to be asleep.

"Legrange!" exclaimed Osborne, on catching sight of him. "Poor devil! Can't we relieve guard or somethin', what?"

Fenwick looked carefully round the lounge. There was no sign of the Kavanaghs, father or daughter, of Lord Eynsham or Henley.

"We can tell him the Kitten isn't expected here to-night," he answered, as he led the way across the lounge. "Good evening, Major."

Legrange slowly opened his eyes and bowed.

"Oh, good evening, gentlemen," he said. "I thought I should very possibly see you here. The Prince is still in the Turkish bath."

"Still in the Turkish bath?" echoed Osborne, unable to mask his surprise. This had formed no part of the Kitten's published programme; but, left to himself, no one could say what so incurable an eccentric would do; coupled with Armitage, it was worth no man's while to guess. Yet he had washed and adorned himself with superfluous care before leaving St. James' Street.

"He's not been there more than ten minutes," explained Legrange. "I understand he's got a bit of a chill. By the way, gentlemen, I can't compliment you on the way you've kept your part of the bargain. I happened to look in here this afternoon on quite other business, and the first name I saw in the Visitors' Book was the Prince's.

Suite Number Seven. There's no harm done, as it happens, but you promised to let me know any change of address."

Osborne pulled up a chair at right angles and gazed at him in perplexity.

"But to the best of my knowledge and belief he's still stayin' with me. It's not half an hour since he left. He may be dinin' here, of course."

"He would hardly order the best suite in the hotel if he had only dropped in to dinner."

"Depends how badly he wanted a drink," said Osborne, remembering their strategy at the Tring Hotel that morning at one o'clock. "You oughtn't to say that, Major, after shadowin' us so closely last night."

Legrange laughed indulgently.

"That was rather different," he said. "Then, he brought no luggage with him. . . . But as you *are* here, gentlemen, I'll slip away before he comes down. Please don't think that I'm complaining for the sake of complaining; if he changes his address once in twenty-four hours, it will be the wisest thing he can do, and no one will be better pleased than myself. Indeed, if you remember, it's what I suggested he should do. All I ask is that you assist me with a hint of his prospective movements. A word on the telephone, you know. . . . Oh, and this *is* a complaint, Captain Osborne. When unauthorized persons are notoriously taking too much interest in him, you really ought not to let him come to a place like this entirely unattended—not so much as a valet. It adds to my responsibility and to the calls on my time."

Unlike most men who do not know what to say, Osborne was content to say nothing. He lay back in his chair, glanced across to Fenwick and left him to play the hand.

Legrange was evidently waiting for some assurance or explanation, and it was given him.

"I agree with all you say," said Fenwick unreservedly. "Has it occurred to you, though, that our position is not altogether an easy one? You see, we've no official status. The Prince is good enough to treat us as personal friends, to stay with us, to accept any little service we are able to offer. . . . Really that makes it all the harder. We'll do what we can, Major, but, frankly, I don't want a hint from the Prince that I'm interfering with his liberty of action, and, by Jove, *if* he takes it into his head to sleep here or there or the other place and doesn't want it talked about, I have to respect his wishes. You've had to deal with his kind before."

Legrange nodded, with a rueful smile.

"My heaven will be strictly republican," he said, as he bowed and moved away.

As soon as he was out of earshot, Osborne turned to Fenwick with an expression of bewilderment.

"Wha-what the devil was he talkin' about?" he demanded.

Fenwick smiled grimly.

"Channel sailings resumed," he said. "You remember what Armitage told the Kitten. It's the real man this time."

"Well, why did you go on kiddin' him, what?"

"Why didn't you stop me?" Fenwick countered.

Osborne shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. The difficulty of a heart-to-heart confession seemed no less than in the morning; indeed, the account seemed to be mounting against them by compound interest, and for every hour that they maintained their false position, a longer, tenser period of retribution stretched into the future. Privately he decided that the truth might leak out, but would never be volunteered, and on that assumption there was everything to be said in favour of a quiet disappearance for the remainder of their leave.

Untwining his long legs, he began to move across the lounge with silent, cat-like steps.

"Where are you off to?" Fenwick called after him.

"I'm goin' home," he whispered over his shoulder. "This place doesn't strike me as healthy. I'm goin' to spend the rest of my leave at Brighton."

"Come back at once."

He hesitated and compromised by standing three paces away.

"You're simply askin' for trouble," he complained.

Fenwick snorted derisively.

"Asking for it! The trouble's *here*."

"That's why I want to go somewhere else."

"You're going back on the Kitten—and the Prince?"

Osborne frowned impatiently.

"Bunkum, Nap!" he exclaimed. "Bunkum all the way, and I've told you so till I'm sick of it."

"And in spite of your lucid and forcible reasoning, I propose to find out if it *is* bunkum; and, if it isn't, I'm going to see it through."

"See *what* through? The game's up, the other man's here."

Fenwick beckoned him back to his chair.

"And not four people in the world know it! I'm not asking much, Osborne; I want you to carry on over to-night, and after that you can do what you like. We may force a decision this evening, but, if we don't, there's nothing more to be done; we can't keep it up any longer, and I'll come with you to Brighton or anywhere else you like."

Anything like a plea or bargain or suggestion of terms was so foreign to Nap Fenwick's temperament that Osborne was visibly affected. They were already within sight of dinner-time, and it seemed a little thing to swear allegiance till the following day, always provided that he were allowed to leave the Semiramis immediately.

"We can't stir till we've seen Miss Kavanagh," Fenwick reminded him.

All Osborne's fears returned on that word.

"This place is gettin' on my nerves, Nap!" he exclaimed. "I can see it all. The Kitten'll blow in, and the Prince'll blow in, and they'll meet and go on meetin' like some beastly stage farce."

His voice was querulous but no longer menacing, and Nap Fenwick, seeing that the battle was over, vouchsafed no reply and sat thoughtfully chewing a toothpick and staring up at the ceiling. Fiv minutes passed, then another five; at length he sat up like a man whose decision is taken.

"I've thought it out," he said, "but there's no time to lose. You must send up your card to Miss Kavanagh . . ."

"My name's not comin' into this any more," Osborne interrupted.

"All our names are coming into it; don't be a mean hound, Osborne. I'm giving you the soft option as usual. I've got to go and tell the Prince the whole story; it's the only way to keep him bottled up here."

Osborne rose dramatically from his chair and picked up his hat.

"I've made a pretty fair dam' fool of myself as it is," he said. "I don't mind doin' it again in a good cause—it's all in the day's work—but I'm hanged if I allow my name to be used."

The argument was interrupted by the clang of the lift gate opening and the appearance of Pat Kavanagh in the lounge. In readiness for her evening's work, she wore an olive green coat and skirt and a large black hat; her face was pale, and her eyes waterily bright.

Fenwick pushed his friend forward with a whispered instruction what questions he was to ask; memories of Oxford suggested that Osborne might be a more successful, and would certainly be a less discourteous, inquirer than himself.

The girl crossed the lounge and was making for the drawing-room when Osborne barred her path.

"Have I the pleasure of addressin' Miss Kavanagh?" he began. "My name . . ."

"But surely we've met before," said Pat, with a puzzled smile.

"We were dinin' in the same room, certainly. Last night, when Prince Christoforo . . ."

The girl's pale cheeks flushed angrily, and her voice and manner took on all the imperious dignity of seventeen.

"You were with him?" she asked. "I remember now. Well, this afternoon I had to ask him to leave me and I must repeat the request to his friends."

She made a half-step forward, and Osborne fell back. His place, however, was quickly taken by Fenwick.

"We will leave you," he said, with purposeful deliberation, "when you have been so kind as to give us a little valuable information. I understand that the Prince . . ."

The girl's eyes, almost black by artificial light, flashed with anger.

"He's not a prince!" she cried. "He's a common impostor, and I'm very annoyed with him."

There was an intentionally audible, quick intake of breath between Fenwick's teeth.

"Very *much* annoyed," he suggested.

"Please don't correct my English!" she cried.

"But it wasn't English till I corrected it. I understand that—Kit Markham, let's call him—that Kit Markham had arranged—in fact, you told him that he might meet you to-night."

"I expressly told him not to!"

"Your father rang up from the War Office at six o'clock this evening to know if the engagement held good."

Pat looked at him in fierce anticipation of quick triumph.

"You're each as bad as the other!" she said. "My father left London at four for Aldershot. Will you kindly allow me to get by?"

Nap Fenwick glanced at Osborne with raised eyebrows, nodded slowly and turned again to the girl.

"The voice purported to be General Kavanagh's," he said. "It is essential that we should know when and where you proposed to meet, for Markham is going to meet you, as arranged."

"I decline to meet him."

"No one wants you to meet him, Miss Kavanagh. It would be easier if you thought more of my questions and less of your own dignity. We are in a strong position."

His threatening voice abashed her for a moment, but she quickly recovered herself, turned and began walking to the Restaurant door.

"I am going to send for the manager," she said.

Fenwick gave the disconcerting, short laugh that he usually reserved for non-collegiate students at viva voce examinations.

"It is what I should do," he answered, "if I were a girl. You will ask the manager to send for the police, I suppose?"

"Yes!"

Nap Fenwick's nose came down in a masterly sneer.

"On what charge, I wonder?" he inquired. "It's immaterial, however. What concerns you now is that, if you introduce the police, I introduce the press." He took out his pocket-book and handed her Millbank's card. "This gentleman has been promised an interview as soon as there is any statement to make; he won't be particular so long as the stuff's sufficiently sensational, and any gutter journalist would make good reading out of the General who was hoaxed by a bogus prince, and the General's daughter who was so civil, when she thought she was entertaining a guest of high rank, and then turned him from the door when she found out her mistake. Is it good enough, Miss Kavanagh, or shall we treat?"

She stamped her foot in uncontrollable anger.

"Your behaviour is not that of a gentleman!" she exclaimed.

"That is no answer to my question," said Fenwick, with mild exasperation.

"I refuse to answer any question of yours."

He turned to Osborne, pointedly ignoring her existence.

"The message ***didn't*** come from the General, you see," he said. "You must go out and draw every restaurant and music hall until you find the Kitten. If you fail, go to Victoria, find out when Miss Kavanagh's shift comes off duty and patrol the road between Victoria and this hotel. Take a good stick—they won't use firearms in the neighbourhood of the station or Park, it's too risky; I'll join you when I can, but I've got to see the man here and persuade him not to leave the hotel. Get under way at once and don't count on me till you see me."

Osborne picked up his hat and stick and hurried to the door, bowing to Pat as he went. The prompt obedience to Fenwick's quick, mechanical orders impressed her no less than the orders themselves.

"What were you saying about firearms?" she asked in an awed voice.

"They won't be used—a knife's quieter and just as effective."

"But who . . . ?"

Fenwick turned on her severely.

"If this is idle curiosity, Miss Kavanagh, I've better use for my time than in gratifying it. If you want to help, you must do it quickly. The man who'll probably be found with a knife between his ribs is my friend, Kit Markham. He's a good fellow, though he's not a prince. There is a prince, however, Prince Christoforo of Catania, staying in this hotel, and it's long odds that Markham is assassinated in mistake for him."

With a sudden convulsive movement, Pat covered her face with her hands.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" she whispered.

"I told you that it was worth some one's while to send him a spurious message with a view to luring him into the darkened streets in the small hours of the morning. Isn't that enough?"

"I . . . I don't understand it!"

"I never ask a woman to understand anything. I asked for certain definite information."

Her hands fell, and she looked at him with eyes of fear.

"It was one o'clock outside the canteen," she said.

Fenwick looked at the watch on his wrist and walked to the main staircase.

"Sixteen minutes to get a plain answer to a plain question!" he exclaimed. "And some of them want votes, my God! What was it Legrange said? Suite Number Seven?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST OF THE SANSCULOTTES

ANYONE who has ever had audience of a Royal Personage at the Semiramis Hotel knows that the suites reserved for princes and potentates are to be found on the first floor to the right of the staircase. The corridor is as wide as many a palace ball-room and is always silent, always in a half-light. Non-royal visitors to the hotel need not to be told that they must not trespass on to the thick purple carpet; the majestic silence is disconcerting, and he would be as bold as ill-conditioned who impudently disturbed the imperial shadows or flattened a plebeian nose against the ten-foot mahogany doors. When coronations or royal obsequies are afoot, the wide passage is half filled with picturesque guards, silent and motionless as the shadows into which they melt; a plumed hat here, a turban there, and beyond them a white fez, a round fur cap, and a silver helmet. At other times a discreet, watchful civilian may be found sitting or standing by the stair-head; or, if the august visitor desire to remain unknown, the corridor is left pointedly and conspicuously deserted.

Nap Fenwick walked slowly out of the lounge and more slowly up the stairs. The hum of conversation, the bustle of moving men and women, the light ripple of laughter grew faint and died dreamily away as he mounted; half way to the first floor the orchestra itself grew muffled; as his foot left the last stair and sank into the soft carpet, he was met by a silence and desolation such as will await the Wandering Jew when the rest of mankind has been gathered to its fathers.

Walking on tiptoe down the corridor, he rehearsed suitable speeches and discarded them as unsuitable. " I expect you have forgotten, sir, the days when I had the honour of meeting you occasionally at Oxford. . . ." " For what I am going to tell you, sir, I must beg your forgiveness beforehand. . . ." " I take the liberty of intruding, sir, because I have reason to believe that your life is in considerable danger. . . ." Fenwick impatiently removed his glasses and put them rather more straight on his unaccommodating nose. The right phrase refused to come, and, if he ever found it, his difficulties would still be only beginning. Assuming that the Prince shared his suspicions, accepted his plans, and consented to remain in the hotel until they had come to a decision with Henley, there was still an explanation wanted that Fenwick did not feel competent to furnish. " But why did you and your friends think fit to borrow my name . . . ? " He could visualize the Prince sitting low in his arm-chair, one leg crossed over the other and the tips of his fingers pressed together, as he was wont to sit in his rooms at Oxford discussing the governance and institutions of England, a round-faced, bald young man, courteous and unassuming, but quick-tempered and resentful of any suspected familiarity.

Fenwick stopped in front of the folding mahogany door of Suite Number Seven. He had told Osborne and Pat Kavanagh that there was no time to be lost, he had repeated it to himself ever since leaving the lounge; yet now he deliberately fingered his tie, looked at his watch, listened, pulled down his waistcoat, patted his scanty wisps of upstanding hair and listened again. Hearing no sound within, he sighed, jerked his shirt cuffs into visibility and very gently knocked.

There was no answer.

He listened again and again caught nothing but the fancied thumping of his own heart. After a moment's hesitation he knocked once more, this time with the bluff daring of one who is trying to stimulate his own courage. There was still no answer, and in desperation he tried the handle.

"Damn!" he exclaimed hypocritically, and followed the expletive with an uncontrollable sigh of relief, as the door failed to yield.

The interview and explanation were only postponed, but he sidled along the corridor and down the stairs with the light step of a man who has been reprieved. In the lounge he chose a comfortable chair, lit a cigarette and ordered a cocktail. He wanted to collect his thoughts and he wanted to be alone. Osborne and his other allies had been trained to look to him for leadership—as was but right and proper—but at present he was in a position to lead no one. A Turkish bath may be over, like love, within an hour; it may linger drowsily on, like a romance, for five. "If I wait here," he reflected, "I may not see the Prince, and I shall certainly miss Osborne and the Kitten. It is a dilemma." Academic training, as ever, came to his confusion. "If I don't wait here, I may still miss Osborne and the Kitten, and I shall certainly miss the Prince. . . . I wonder why we go on teaching logic at Oxford."

He was still without a plan when he looked up to find the head waiter standing and bowing deferentially. Fenwick was conscious of a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach; he wondered whether the man had yet had time to meet the new Prince.

"His Highness will dine in the Restaurant, sir?" he inquired, "or in his own room?"

Fenwick breathed more easily.

"Did he give no orders?" he asked.

"I think not, sir. I have not seen His Highness and did not know that he was here until the reception clerk told me."

The aide-de-camp stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I'll find out and let you know," he promised.

"It will probably be in his own room; he doesn't want any fuss made, as you know."

The head waiter bowed and made a note in his book.

"You will be dining with him, sir?" he hazarded.

"I'm afraid I can't say yet. My arrangements are so uncertain," he added, with truth.

"But you are staying here, sir? I understood that the reception clerk was reserving the adjoining suite, as His Highness came unattended."

Fenwick looked up slowly.

"That's Number Eight, isn't it?" he asked. "I suppose it communicates with the Prince's rooms?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Then I think the most convenient thing would be for me to move in there. Would it be troubling you too much to ask the reception clerk to let me have the key? I can telephone for a bag to be sent round."

Five minutes later Nap Fenwick again mounted the stairs. There was now no diffidence or hesitation in his movements, and when he told himself that there was no time to lose he said it with conviction. Omitting no precaution, he tapped deferentially at the door of Number Seven, listened, and hurried on to the next suite. Unlocking the door, he passed through and locked it again on the inside. Then he tiptoed to the communicating door and threw it open.

Prince Christoforo's dressing-room was a study in the artless disarray of a man unused to travelling without a valet. Piled in an arm-chair lay a tangle of brown tweeds, socks, and underclothes; a soft hat and fur coat had been thrown carelessly on to the bed, and shoes and spats lay in disorder by the dressing-table. On a chest of drawers stood a red leather dispatch-box, battered at the corners and blazoned with impressive arms, and by the window two open suit-cases. The Prince's method of unpacking was petulantly feminine and consisted in throwing everything on to the floor until he had dug down to what he required.

Fenwick bolted the mahogany double doors and came back for a second inspection.

"Now!" he exclaimed and was half frightened to find himself thinking aloud. At the dispatch-box he hardly glanced. Homer P. Henley would no doubt have given much to be left alone with it for five minutes, but the Prince's eyes would turn to it the moment he came back from the Turkish bath. To tamper with it would invite a hue and cry and in all likelihood send the Prince scouring London until its precious contents were recovered. Fenwick turned to the suit-cases.

The luggage suggested but a short stay. There were a grey morning-coat suit, a dress suit, and smoking-jacket, a blue suit and the travelling tweeds in the arm-chair; half a dozen silk and dress shirts, underclothes, shoes . . . and a hat-box which Fenwick had not observed before.

"No pyjamas," he murmured at the end of his stocktaking, "and no dressing-gown. That proves it."

He searched the suit-cases a second time, only to strengthen his hypothesis that the Prince had gone to the Turkish bath by the private staircase at the end of the corridor and had gone in pyjamas and a dressing-gown. He went back to the communicating door and surveyed his own suite. It was smaller than the Prince's, but contained a bedroom, bathroom, and sitting-room. The bathroom door, which he now made haste to examine, was fastened with an inside bolt; there was no lock.

"Damnation!" he exclaimed and looked round the bedroom. "Oh well, can't be helped," he added, and returned to the Prince's suite.

A moment later he had collected the four pairs of trousers and was hurriedly laying them between the mattresses of his own bed, to a whispered running commentary. "Least I can do," he panted, as he let fall the top mattress and smoothed the counterpane. "If man won't bring valet, *some* one must press trousers." Satisfied that the bed looked undisturbed, he re-entered the Prince's room and softly unbolted the door. The red dispatch-box caught his eye and caused him to pause and shrug his shoulders. "Very sorry!" he murmured apologetically. "But, after all, if the Prince can't go to the Foreign Office, the Foreign Office must come to the Prince."

Then he unlocked his own door, stepped quietly into the passage and tried to sidle with dignity downstairs instead of breaking into a hurried run. The head waiter stood at his desk by the entrance to the Restaurant, and in a mood of artistic irresponsibility Fenwick went up to him.

" You may take it as certain that the Prince will dine in his own room," he said. " He will ring when he is ready."

" Will you be dining with him, sir ? "

" I think he will prefer to dine alone, all things considered." He put on his hat and coat, walked out of the lounge and made his way along Piccadilly to his club. " In fact," he continued moodily to himself, " I doubt if I shall ever dine at the Semiramis again. As Osborne says, it's not healthy."

At a quarter to one next morning two men were distinguishable by their mufti from the crowd of soldiers pouring out of the leave trains and surging into the Victoria canteen. They stood at opposite ends, but, as the crowd grew thinner, each observed the other, and they hurried to meet.

" Any luck ? " asked Fenwick.

Osborne shook his head.

" I searched nine restaurants and four music halls," he said. " There was no sign of him, and, not knowin' when he was due here, I didn't like to spin it out any longer. He hasn't come yet."

" How long have you been waiting ? "

" About ten minutes."

Fenwick nodded without speaking, and the two men fell into stride and walked to the end of the platform and back. If Henley designed to strike before the Kitten reached Victoria, the tragedy would be over by now; otherwise the gods were playing into their hands.

"Did you see the Prince?" Osborne inquired as they came opposite the canteen.

"He was in the Turkish bath," Fenwick answered. "I expect he's there still."

"Why?"

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders.

"The bath is warm," he explained, "and the night is cold."

Shortly and without vainglory he described his activities at the Semiramis. Osborne looked at his friend in amazement; then exclaimed, with a certain dismayed admiration:

"My God!"

"If the Kitten had behaved rationally, we should have carried the whole position," said Fenwick irritably. "Damned young fool! Now we've got to start again from the beginning and strafe Henley before he finds out who's staying at the Semiramis."

They were again strolling down the platform, but the hands of the clock marked one, and Fenwick hastened to establish himself on a trolly by the entrance to the station.

"He's cuttin' it fine, what?" yawned Osborne, glancing first at his watch and then at the platform gate.

"He *would*," said Fenwick contemptuously. "I say, that's not Armitage, is it?"

A figure in naval uniform had jumped from a taxi and was making for the place where they were seated. A moment later a hand waved in greeting.

"What you bin doin' with the Kitten, Tony?" demanded Osborne as he joined them.

"Isn't he here? He left me at half-past twelve."

"But I bin hangin' about . . ." Osborne began.

Fenwick silenced him with an impressive gesture.

"Let's get the whole thing in proper order," he begged. "What have you done, Armitage, and when and where did you do it?"

Lieutenant Armitage steadied himself, not without effort.

"We dined at the Carlton Grill Room," he began. "At seven . . ."

Fenwick turned to Osborne.

"I got there at eight thirty," was the answer to the mute question.

"Oh, we left about eight fifteen," said Armitage. "Then to the Empire till about half-past eleven, then to the club for a scrambled egg and a dry Scotch ginger ale till twelve fifteen. I stayed behind for a cigar, and he tooled round here . . ."

"On foot?" Fenwick interrupted, not without anxiety.

"No, in a taxi. Oh, he's all right."

"Well, what are *you* doin' here?" Osborne inquired.

Armitage laughed.

"The Kitten seemed a bit uncertain of his reception here," he explained. "So I thought I'd roll along and, if there was nothing doing, we might see life a bit before going to bed. Hasn't he shown up yet?"

Osborne shook his head.

"I've been here since five-and-twenty to," he said.

"He's probably come and gone," suggested Armitage.

"The girl doesn't come off duty till one," explained Fenwick.

"Have you looked in the canteen? He's in there with her, for a cert."

Nap Fenwick's comprehensive imagination had seemingly not embraced this possibility. The three jumped up from the trolly, hurried to the door of the canteen and looked inside. Between the jostling shoulders of the men they could catch a glimpse of a moist, steaming counter where cups and plates were handed out and returned with a ceaseless, racking clatter. Behind the counter stood a row of women in overalls, and behind them a group gathered round the wash-tubs. All worked under the direction of a dominating matron who had the air of having made her own clothes on daringly unconventional lines and written several books about misunderstood women who married violet-eyed men younger than themselves and lived unhappily ever afterwards.

There was no sign of the Kitten, but, as they stood and looked in, Pat Kavanagh came from behind a screen, dressed to go home.

Fenwick hurried up as she left by a side door.

" Where is he ? " he demanded abruptly.

The girl's cheeks were flushed, perhaps with the heat of the canteen, perhaps with annoyance at meeting Fenwick.

" I neither know nor care," she answered.

" But he was due here at one."

" He came at half-past twelve."

Fenwick raised his eyebrows.

" Well, what's happened to him ? "

" I sent him away. D'you imagine I'd let myself be seen with him after the way he's behaved ? "

" You—sent—him—away ? After I'd told you that there were men waiting to stick a knife into him ? "

" I told him all that. I told him you were looking for him and that you thought he was in danger. I said he'd better go and find you, but he wasn't to come near me."

Nap Fenwick turned to his companions.

" Go straight back to the flat," he said. " If the Kitten's there, keep him there, whatever happens ; if he's not there, wait till I come. I'm going to see Miss Kavanagh back to her hotel."

Pat raised her hand in protest.

" I don't want . . ."

" My dear young lady, you've done enough harm for one night. It isn't a question of what you want, but what I propose to do, and I propose to accompany you. The gang knows perfectly well that you're wandering about to-night, and you're not going to wander alone. Which way do you usually go ? Up Grosvenor Place ? Then I shall take you down Victoria Street and across the Park. We may get a taxi, but we shall probably have to walk."

CHAPTER XVII

A NIGHT ATTACK

AT the door of the canteen the group broke into two parties. Osborne and Armitage strode away towards Grosvenor Gardens, while Nap Fenwick and Pat, rebellious, but no longer protesting, turned into Victoria Street. Traffic was over for the night in that part of London, and they reached the Army and Navy Stores without meeting a single vehicle or exchanging a single word.

"It looks as if we should have to walk the whole way," said Fenwick, breaking the long silence and gazing up and down the dim street.

Pat nodded without speaking—she had made up her mind not to speak—and they turned down the footpath by the Windsor Hotel and entered the Park by Queen Anne's Gate. For kidnapping or any other crime of violence the conditions were perfect. The roads and paths were desolate, the moonless night and absence of wind had led the police to expect or at least to prepare for a Zeppelin raid, so that the always low lights had been further obscured. The girl walked with a certain fearless freedom of gait, but Nap grasped his heavy stick firmly and peered short-sightedly from side to side. Once or twice he touched her wrist and stopped suddenly to listen for pursuing footsteps; then resumed his walk after successfully working his companion and himself into a high state of nervous tension.

In time they reached the bridge over the artificial lake basin and in time crossed it, though Nap Fenwick's obvious fears of an ambush made their progress slow. Pat was growing impatient of his elaborate precautions and mounted the slope to the Mall at her own pace, until an unseen obstacle caused her to stumble. She recovered herself quickly and was walking on, when a noise made her turn round. Fenwick, too, it seemed, had met an obstacle on his own account. She heard the sound of a body falling with heavy helplessness. No blow had been struck, there was no cry, and for a moment after the thud of the fall there was the silence of a dream. Pat took a step towards the place where she imagined her companion to be lying, and at sound of the footfall a lamp flashed from the opposite side of the path, circled round, blinding her for a moment, shortened its beam and came to rest in the middle of the path where Fenwick sprawled in a blazing frame of light. All her strength could not restrain a scream, and the sound seemed to have the effect of galvanizing Fenwick and his unseen assailant into activity. There was an answering cry of " Run for your life, girl ! " and Fenwick scrambled to his feet.

Pat Kavanagh did not run. Though unable to help, she felt something within her that forbade flight ; to take any part in the nightmare, half-seen struggle would as likely as not end in hampering her own side ; she stepped back from the circle of light, ready to throw herself upon anyone who came to the support of the invisible antagonist.

No one else came, however, and the attack was over in less than two minutes. Fenwick was wont to pride himself on quickness of brain, and during those two minutes brain and body moved in rare, rapid harmony. Nearly eight hours before, as he sat in Osborne's library, drawing Maltese crosses, horses' heads, and sketch maps of the Park, he had visualized a dozen different encounters ; each varied in place, time, and method, but there were elements common to all. Thus, as he had foretold at the Semiramis, no firearms would be employed on any route from Victoria to the hotel ; thus, also, as the Kitten was known to be coming in company, there would be at least two assailants. The second thought was in Fenwick's mind when he told his companion to run for her life ; the first inspired and directed the form of his counter-attack.

From the moment of his fall he lay motionless, grasping his stick. It was so dark that he could neither see nor be seen ; if he scrambled up, the noise would guide his attacker ; if he made no sound, the attacker must betray himself by the first movement. It was not easy to remain passive, waiting for a knife to explore his ribs or a sandbag to beat down on the back of his head ; it was not easy, but, as Fenwick told himself, it had to be done. The strain of those silent, motionless three seconds was almost more than he could bear, and his heart leaped exultantly when the beam of light flashed first on to Pat Kavanagh and then on to himself. Jumping up and still blinded by the white rays, he whirled his stick horizontally round his head, offering death to any who came, behind or before, within its radius. Dearly would he have liked to strike at the dazzling lamp, but to lower the point of his stick was to uncover his own head and chest and leave his adversary free to bend forward and lunge or hit over the top of his guard. Blinking and dazed, he moved forward inch by inch, forcing his opponent back to the railings in his effort to escape the whistling orbit of the stick.

"Run, I tell you!" he called again to the girl.

There was still no sound of reinforcements coming up, and he began to suspect an unforeseen ruse. The man holding the lamp must be nearly up to the railings, but there was no resistance. Once there seemed to be an answering swish, as though a second stick were being whirled round in the air ; once, too, there was a click, and Fenwick felt the shock of impact running through his arm and shoulder ; then the stick crashed into something that for a fraction of time seemed hard and then yielded. The light went out, there was a metallic rattle, and a whimpering sob, as of a feverish child crying in its sleep.

Fenwick spun round on his heel, still whirling the stick, and ran back to the other railing, then for ten yards down towards the bridge and another ten in the direction of the Mall.

" Swept *and* garnished ! " he muttered, as the destroying stick whirled for the last time idly through space. " Are you all right, Miss Kavanagh ? I think it's all over now. Henley seems to have come alone."

He lowered his stick, and they returned to the scene of the fight.

" Are you hurt ? " Pat asked anxiously.

" Not touched, thanks. This, you will observe," he added in a tone of vindictive triumph, " is what my friend Osborne in his superior wisdom described as a mare's nest. Help me to find the lamp, Miss Kavanagh, and we can see what it's all about."

He dropped on to his knees and crawled along by the side of the railings, making semi-lunar sweeps over the ground with his hands. Suddenly an exclamation escaped him.

" Have you found it ? " she inquired.

" I'm not far off. Keep away ! Keep away ! " he added excitedly. " It's all right ; I've found it. Now, if you're not afraid to go alone, you'd better get home ; you're not likely to be molested again."

She paused irresolutely.

"I want to know what's happened to Mr. Markham," she said.

"So do I. You won't find out here, though."

"But who . . . who's *that*? And what's happened to him?"

"Whoever he is, he won't do it again," said Fenwick grimly. She took a step forward. "If you *like* walking through blood, I won't interfere with your innocent pleasures; if you've never tried, don't. I *have*."

Pat gave a little sob.

"Have you—*killed* him?" she whispered.

"I can't tell without looking. Are you afraid? I don't suppose it'll be a pleasant sight."

He flashed the beam of the electric torch on to the ground and methodically reconstructed the attack, while the girl covered her eyes and leant dizzily on his arm. A stout wire rope, drawn taut, stretched from one railing to the other across the path, nine inches from the ground. Two yards away, a dark pool grew and spread, and by the side of the pool lay the huddled body of a man. His head was crushed in on the left side half an inch above the ear, and he had fallen forward on his face.

Fenwick surveyed the scene dispassionately for a moment, then took a quick step forward. His victim's hat had fallen off in the struggle, revealing a bald and yellow scalp.

"Who the devil's this?" he exclaimed, bending the bowed shoulders back. The face was old and clean-shaven; but for the fear in the staring eyes the expression would have been vacuous. "I've killed somebody, even though it's not the man I thought it was. I've never seen this fellow before."

Pat laid an imploring hand on his sleeve.

"I can't bear it," she said, with a shudder. "Please, please come away."

Fenwick laughed with the rather harsh good-humour of a man who has narrowly escaped an ugly death and whose nerves are still unsteady.

"In one minute," he said, continuing his inspection. "Hullo! Hullo!"

On the ground to the right of the body, lying where it had dropped from the stricken man's fingers, was an iron ball studded with spikes; between the spikes at one place was a ring, and attached to the ring eighteen inches of strong steel chain; at the other end of the chain was an oval copper handle, like that used in throwing the hammer.

"Goes conveniently into the pocket," Fenwick pointed out, "and, if anyone wonders how you came by such a weapon, you can always say it's what the Huns use to kill their prisoners with, and that a friend sent it you as a trophy. This was meant for me, I suppose." He swept the path with a circular beam from the torch. "Ah, I thought so. It didn't seem likely that this old dug-out would be left to do the job single-handed. This was a present for you, Miss Kavanagh."

From the railings opposite the place where the dead body lay there hung a second chain with a similar studded ball at the end. The girl looked at it and shivered.

" Please take me home," she begged. " I . . . I simply feel sick."

Fenwick thrust his wrists through the railings and wiped some of the blood from his hands on the grass. It was convenient that Miss Kavanagh had not fainted, but highly irregular; he fancied that all women always fainted in all crises, and had once thrown the generalization into the form of a syllogism in Barbara for the edification of the Pass Mods. pupils of his college.

" If I come to the Mall with you," he suggested, " do you feel equal to going the rest of the way alone ? "

" But you're not going to stay here ? "

He nodded, with sinister determination.

" It isn't panning out quite as I expected," he said, " but we're doing uncommonly well. The Prince—the real Prince, I mean—is confined to barracks with no possibility of getting out and running his head into danger; the Kitten must be home and in bed by now, with Osborne and Armitage to hold him down if he gets restive; I've strafed one of the gang without either of us getting so much as a scratch; and now I'm going to round off a promising night's work by strafing the ringleader." He crossed the path and unhooked the spiked ball from the railings. "Quite clearly a second man was expected, and a second man I propose to bring down. With any luck it will be the chief; I can't make out why he's so long coming, but I've got the rest of the night to wait for him."

Carelessly swinging the iron ball with one hand, he walked up to the Mall and took leave of his companion, with a parting injunction to keep her lips sealed until he gave her permission to speak. Shaken and dazed, she crossed the road, entered Pall Mall by St. James' Palace, and hurried up St. James' Street into Piccadilly. It was after two when she reached the Semiramis. The lounge was in darkness, and the door to the Restaurant closed; the entrance in Greenfield Street, however, was still open, and she arrived to find the night porter in animated conversation with a policeman. Seventeen years of innocence were insufficient to give her an easy conscience after the time that she had spent in the Park; with a hurried nod to the porter she fluttered into the dim hall and ran upstairs. An altercation was evidently in progress, for the porter kept repeating with emphasis:

"It ain't reasonable or proper. His lordship's an old gent, and, if you want to see him, you ought to come at a decent hour."

With equal emphasis the constable replied:

"My orders is to bring this 'ere note and not to go till I've 'ad me answer. If his lordship refuses to come, I can't make him, but the Inspector, 'e said, ' Don't you worrit abaht that. His lordship'll come all right when he knows it's on account of Prince Christoforo.' "

Pat would have liked to hear more of the conversation, but dared not wait. Above all things in the world she wanted to get to her own familiar room, to flood it with electric light, and to lock and bolt the door behind her. It was incredible that at six o'clock the previous evening she had changed her clothes in that room, yet the dress that she had worn for the luncheon party was lying across the back of a chair, and the antimacassar on her sofa was still disordered from contact with her hot cheeks when she flung herself down and wept with mortification and disappointment.

As she undressed and brushed her long fair hair she expected every moment to wake gasping from a nightmare; yet her arms' movements, reflected in the mirror, seemed sufficiently real, and she was half surprised to find her face only pale and not seared and haggard as she expected it to be. Once, as she said her prayers, a memory of the altercation downstairs stole into her brain; she chased it away and jumped into bed, almost fearing for her reason if she tried to solve another problem.

In the meantime Fenwick had gone back to his post. After waiting and assuring himself that no one was yet at hand, he subjected the dead body to a leisurely and exhaustive examination. The clothes—even to the hat and faded silk pocket-handkerchief—were unmarked; the pockets contained nothing that would help to establish their owner's identity. A pair of horn-rimmed spectacles reposed in a plain imitation-leather case; a shilling knife with one broken blade lay side by side with an indelible ink pencil and a cigar-cutter; even a shabby crocodile pocket-book contained nothing more than two ten-shilling notes, a third-class return ticket from Hampton Court, a chess problem culled from the "Night Watchman," and a half-sheet of notepaper with the uprights and two lights of a double acrostic "Julius" "Cæsar."

Fenwick restored the property to the places whence it had come, switched off his torch, and leaned against the railings grasping his stick. It had served him in good stead, and in a duel to the death he did not care to trust himself to an untried weapon like the spiked ball. For the first half-hour of his vigil, every kind of imaginary noise fell upon his ears; he heard whispering in the grass behind him and cautious footsteps crossing the suspension bridge to his right; once he could have sworn that the dead man at his feet moved.

As the hours passed slowly by, a deeper silence fell on the city. The half-heard rumble of carts going westward along Piccadilly died away; the sharp reports of trucks shunting at Victoria and Charing Cross grew rarer and, as it seemed, fainter.

Drowsiness settled on Fenwick, and he found himself growing stiff and cold in the long autumn night.

There was still no sign of Henley when the black canopy of the sky changed to a misty blend of grey and blue. A quarter of an hour passed, and the outlines of the huddled figure by the railings took on a new clarity ; another quarter of an hour, and Fenwick decided that it was time to go home.

He retraced his steps to Birdcage Walk, made his way up Whitehall and reached St. James' Street from Piccadilly. Osborne had served out latch-keys to both his guests from a bowl on the hall table, and Fenwick let himself in and went straight to the Kitten's room. There was no one there, and the bed was undisturbed. He hurried into his host's room, to find it in the same condition. In the library there was a tray with unused glasses and two full syphons, and on the table beside it lay three letters, one written in pencil. The hand was not unlike that he remembered from the days when the Kitten brought him a weekly essay ; the note, however, was addressed to Osborne, and he did not care to open it without authority.

Fenwick looked at his watch and compared it with the clock. The time was a quarter past six. He opened the telephone directory and looked for Armitage's number in Jermyn Street, but the name did not appear. Then he sat down once again to the reading-lamp and be-scribbled blotting-pad and traced a number of triangles and parallelograms on equal bases and between the same parallels.

"I've not finished with Henley yet," he murmured, as the clock struck seven, and he walked wearily to his bedroom.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

AS they strode through Grosvenor Gardens and turned into the Buckingham Palace Road, Osborne described for Armitage's benefit the episode of the mysterious telephone call. Like the Kitten, they had both been disposed to make light of Nap Fenwick's elaborate suspicions; it was one thing, however, to laugh away some one else's hypothesis and quite another to provide one which would connect and explain the admitted facts. Not one of the three sceptics had yet shown why a burglar should break into a flat and make away without laying hands on a single article of value, nor why a voice should claim to be the voice of General Kavanagh, when General Kavanagh was delivering himself of conventional abuse at an Aldershot inspection.

"Mark you, *I* believe old Nap's chasin' a mare's nest," concluded Osborne, with pleasant disregard of the purity of his metaphors. "I hope the Kitten's got home, though, all the same."

By the entrance to the Royal Stables Armitage stopped to fill his pipe. Though innocent of any snobbish taint, he enjoyed striking a match against a palace wall.

"The thing to do," he suggested, "would be to get hold of Henley and shave his beard. Then we should know once and for all."

"We might also find ourselves languishin' in gaol," interposed the decorous Osborne.

"Not if we doped his drinks scientifically. I've got to rejoin on Thursday, and you're going back on Friday; if I could fill Henley up for half an hour—only half an hour—I'd undertake to keep him cataleptic till Sunday. Why shouldn't we tool round to the Semiramis and incite him to make a night of it? He seems to spend most of his time there, and he'd come if I said I'd got news of the last North Sea scrap. We're hardly likely to run into the Prince, if that's what's troubling you."

Osborne shook his head with marked determination.

"I'm goin' straight home to bed," he declared. "I've had enough princes for one leave."

Skirting the corner of the Palace railings, they entered the Park, crossed the Mall by the Victoria Memorial, and gained the shadowy gravel path between the trees by Lancaster House. It was so dark that they had to pick their way cautiously; but, as they approached the corner of St. James Palace, there was a little more light in the open, and they came suddenly upon a group of four figures gesticulating excitedly and indulging in angry speech.

"Drunk man," observed Armitage hopefully, noticing that one of the party was a policeman. "If he gives any trouble, we'll butt in and earn a police medal. They seem to be warming to their work."

In addition to the policeman there was an agitated little man in peaked cap, blue overcoat, and striped brassard, a stout middle-aged man in blue reefer coat and broad-brimmed hat, and a young man with a broken collar, muddied trousers and caved-in hat. The stout man dabbed at his head from time to time and examined his pocket-handkerchief for traces of blood; the young man wriggled uncomfortably in the policeman's firm grasp; the agitated man poured out a fitful stream of nervous evidence.

"I saw the whole thing, constable," he was saying in a high, fluttering voice. "I was coming out of the Palace . . ."

"If he'll apologize," interrupted the stout man, "guess I'll be glad to be quit of the whole durned business."

Armitage caught Osborne by the sleeve and drew him back into the shadows by the railings. By his voice and by the round beard that he showed on turning to the light, the last speaker had revealed himself [illegible] Henley.

"So far from apologizing, I'll do it again the first time I find you following me."

Osborne started violently and shrank farther into the darkness. It was the Kitten who had spoken, and his voice suggested that, if a struggle had taken place, all the anger of a young man disappointed with the world had gone to strengthen his blows.

"I've cautioned you, remember," said the policeman warningly, as his grip tightened on the Kitten's collar. "Anything you say . . ."

"My good man, if I said what I thought, I should have to charge myself for using obscene language in a public place."

The bearded man nodded, with a certain tolerant understanding.

"He's jagged some," he explained, "and you can say I said so. If you want my advice, I say, 'Let him go,' if he'll promise to light out and go to bed right now. He won't be so valiant when he wakes up to-morrow with a dark brown taste in the mouth."

The agitated little man was not so easily convinced.

"And what happens the next time he's 'jagged,' as you call it?" he demanded shrilly. "The fellow's a public danger; he wants a lesson. I've never seen anything more deliberate. I'm a special constable," he went on, with a quaint, baseless pride. "I was coming off duty at Buckingham Palace and I saw this gentleman walking peacefully along. He had hardly got into the Park when this young miscreant, who was just ahead of him, turned round and said, 'I'll teach you to follow me!' It looked like trouble, so I blew three short blasts on my whistle in accordance with the constabulary instructions and ran forward. Even so, a most murderous blow had been dealt before I could arrest my prisoner and make him secure."

The Special Constable choked with indignation. Public opinion was running against the Kitten, and Osborne leant over to Armitage with a whispered suggestion that they should intervene. In the open space at the corner the policeman could almost be heard making up his mind.

"You come along o' me," he ordered, after suitable deliberation.

"What for?" demanded the Kitten truculently.

"You'll find out quick enough. Are you coming quietly?"

The Kitten screwed his head round and addressed his captor with studied moderation.

"This fellow's been following me," he said, "ever since I landed in England. He was shadowing me last night at the Semiramis and again at lunch there to-day. This evening I drove down to Victoria to meet a lady at the canteen, and this fellow was hanging about in the booking-office; I gave him a solid half-hour—went and sat in a waiting-room, mark you!—to let him get a start, and the moment I leave the station I find him following me again. I don't ask you to take my bare word for all this; you'll find it quite well known to the International Police. Some years ago in St. Petersburg . . ."

"Ah, don't set up that chat to me!" interrupted the policeman, in whose hearing the Kitten's story was considerably too glib.

"You ask Major Legrange," answered the Kitten, resisting as he felt himself being impelled from behind.

"I don't know nothing about Major Legrange."

"*This* fellow does. And so will your inspector."

"We'll see about that. Now then, march!"

Henley stepped forward and laid his hand on the policeman's wrist.

"Say, I got no use for any kind of fuss," he said. "Ninety seconds with a stomach pump will fix his trouble. There's no sort of vice to him."

The policeman shook his head and again inquired if the Kitten proposed to come quietly.

"I'll come quietly," was the answer, "if this fellow comes too."

"He'll come all right," said the Special Constable, with a conscientious man's grim enjoyment of unpleasant duty. "He'll have to give evidence."

"He doesn't seem keen to put his nose inside a police court," sneered the Kitten, buttoning his coat and endeavouring to arrange his broken collar tidily. "There's the business in Rome to explain away, and the spying at Toulon, when he posed as an English doctor."

The Special Constable looked wonderingly at his companion and tapped his forehead interrogatively. Henley smiled and handed him a card.

"I expect you know my name," he said.

"As well as my own," said the other, reading the card. "I'm Borrodaile. You may have seen my name in Admiralty cases."

"You're the K.C., I guess? Couldn't place you at first; thought I knew your face. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Borrodaile. You can see why I want the business fixed right now; I've better use for my time than fooling around in a dime police court."

"It won't take long," said Borrodaile reassuringly. "And it's misplaced kindness to leave a young hooligan like this at large."

With the Kitten safely by the side of the policeman, the party moved forward and turned north through St. James' Palace in the direction of the Tullis Street Police Station. Osborne and Armitage left their ambush and stared at each other inquiringly. Had it ever been practicable, the opportunity of attempting a rescue was now lost.

"We must bail him out and pay his fine," said Osborne, with the air of one long familiar with the practice. "I'm a householder, and they know me pretty well in Tullis Street. We'd better get back to the flat and wait."

"I wonder what name he's going to give," said Armitage half to himself. "It may be a bit more complicated than you think. I'm inclined to follow them, so as not to lose touch with Henley."

"Yes, but when the Kitten wants bail . . ."

Armitage nodded reassuringly.

"We can leave that to Nap," he said. "He must be home by now, and he'd never forgive us if we bailed the Kitten out and then let Henley strafe him. Besides, I'm all in favour of strafing Henley, if we get the chance—just to be on the safe side. If we could corner him till Legrange comes along . . . You know, I'm beginning to think there's something in Nap's theory; as coincidences go, it's a bit thick to find Henley round about Victoria within a yard of the Kitten after one o'clock in the morning. I think the only thing is to take up action stations at the corner of Tullis Street till he comes out and we're decided what to do with him."

Faithful to his promise to stand by Fenwick for the remainder of the night and grateful to anyone who would make up his mind for him, Osborne turned out of St. James' Street, and the two made their way north-east. As the clock of St. Agatha-in-the-West marked two, he knocked out his pipe, filled another and settled himself on St. Agatha's chill, worn bottom step. Seventy yards away a shabby, blistered door under a shrouded gas lamp offered the welcome of Tullis Street Police Station to a vagrant, two scavengers, and a starveling terrier, hopping on three legs.

"Wonder what the devil he's tellin' 'em," murmured Osborne after a silence of several minutes.

"I wonder what the devil he *can* tell them," responded Armitage. "He'll find there'll be dirty work if he tells them he's the Prince. It's rather a murky business if you give a false name, isn't it ? "

"There'll be dirty work if he gives his own name and starts explainin' why he wanders about at night, lammin' inoffensive strangers over the head," said Osborne gloomily. "Why I was ever persuaded . . ."

"Don't grouse ! " interposed Armitage. "This is much more fun than spending your leave in a picture palace."

"I've never been inside a picture palace," answered Osborne, with offended dignity.

"You'd come to it in time. When I was last home, I was reduced to hearing a debate in the House of Lords."

Within the station a group of sorely tried officials patiently, albeit wearily, grappled with a difficult case and an exasperating prisoner. The policeman had described the assault and arrest—passing lightly over the assistance alleged to have been rendered by the Special Constable ; Henley had shown himself eminently reasonable and forgiving ; all that remained was a number of short formalities —a name, an address, a householder as surety.

Here the Kitten sullenly declined to help. He, like his friends on the bottom step of St. Agatha-in-the-West, realized the seriousness of giving a false name; he looked forward a little to the time when he would have to appear before a jaded and sceptical magistrate, realizing well the difficulty of convincing the court of Lieutenant Christopher Markham's right to assault neutral journalists in the London streets. It was easier and safer to leave his identity veiled, admit the assault, and plead boldly that he had struck in self-defence against a would-be assassin.

The word "assassin" caused a flutter of interest in the gas-lit, whitewashed room. A fat inspector, with close-cropped, well-oiled hair, looked gravely over the top of his spectacles and ponderously laid down a squeaking quill. The prisoner was undeniably sober, for all Henley's repeated hints to the contrary; he was apparently of right mind, yet the tale of spies and assassins, shadowings and followings suggested paranoia.

"Come along, come along!" said the Inspector testily. "There's no call to keep every one hanging about half the night. Name—and—address?"

"This fellow knows it," the Kitten answered, pointing to Henley.

"Never clapped eyes on him before," said Henley, "and you bet your life I don't want to again."

The Kitten asked for, and was refused, leave to smoke. The diversion had the effect of giving him a moment's reflection, which was interrupted by the Inspector again demanding his name and address.

"It's really no use my telling you," he answered wearily. "You wouldn't believe me, and we should be just where we are now. Why don't you ring up the International Police Bureau and ask Major Legrange to be kind enough to come here?"

"What's *he* got to do with it?" asked the Inspector wonderingly. To him, at least, the name was not unknown.

"I fancy he's responsible for my personal safety," said the Kitten carelessly. "He'll certainly be able to tell you who I am, because he had an audience—that is to say, he called on me this morning."

Trying not to appear too readily or too visibly impressed, the Inspector whispered to one of his men and left the room. The Special Constable was beginning to look puzzled; Henley sat with his legs stretched out, his eyes half closed, and his hands in his pockets, sucking a toothpick. After a few moments the Inspector returned to say that Major Legrange was not at his office.

"You'd better give your name, sir," he added ingratiatingly.

"I am 'sir' now, apparently," the Kitten commented, with sarcasm in his tone. "Am I allowed to smoke yet?"

The Inspector scratched his head with the end of the quill.

"It's against the regulations," he grumbled.

The Kitten smiled victoriously and looked round for a chair. While it was being brought he drew out his case and lit a cigarette.

"I am not versed in the law of this country," he announced negligently. "I don't want to hinder you in the execution of your duty—though I should like to save you from the consequences of it; all I ask now is that, if I am to be imprisoned, I may go at once, and that you communicate with Major Legrange as early as possible."

The Inspector looked profoundly moved.

"We 'ave to obey rules, sir," he complained, as though answering an objection that had not been made.

"I am not interested in your rules," replied the Kitten, blowing a cloud of smoke. "That is a matter between you and your Home Secretary, or your Foreign Secretary — or — some — more— august — authority — still. Where is my — my *cell*?"

The policeman who had effected the arrest entered into whispered consultation with the Inspector. Both glanced at Henley, and a moment later he was beckoned to join them.

"I? Certainly!" he exclaimed, in answer to a question which the Kitten could not hear. "Guess I said so 'way back. If this gentleman genu*in*ely cottoned on to the idea that I was following him. . . ."

The Kitten jumped to his feet.

"I decline to have the charge withdrawn," he said, "if that's what you're proposing. I insist on this fellow coming into court and meeting Major Legrange."

"Are you bringing a charge?" asked the Inspector.

"I have brought it already," the Kitten blustered.

"I can't do nothing unless you give me your name, sir."

"You wouldn't believe me, if I told you."

The Inspector spread out his hands in bland expostulation.

"You 'aven't given me a chanst," he complained.

In threatening his counter-charge the Kitten had reached a point from which he could not draw back. For a moment he regretted his impetuosity, but it was too late for regrets to be effective. He threw away his cigarette and sighed. Something in the sigh suggested acquiescence, and in a moment writing-paper and a blotting-pad were before him.

"Prince Christoforo of Catania," he wrote, "is the victim of excessive zeal on the part of the police. He will be deeply obliged if Captain Osborne will kindly call here without delay to establish his identity to the satisfaction of the authorities."

Then he wrote in similar terms to Lord Eynsham at the Semiramis.

"There is no objection to your reading them," he said, as he handed the two letters to the Inspector.

CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT COUNTER-ATTACK

IT was an established principle with the Kitten make the best of a good job. Had it ever been his fate to rob the Bank of England, he would have spent the proceeds pleasurably and fast, instead of locking himself in a room, thrusting the stolen money under a bed and waiting timorously for the arrival of the police. If in the future, as seems but too probable, he find himself married to more than one lady at a time, he will no doubt devote his days to his wives in rotation instead of living with one, deserting the rest and pretending that bigamy is a word outside his comprehension. In the Kitten's philosophy, the thought that crime has to be paid for was no reason for not enjoying the crime.

Leaning back in his chair and swinging one leg over the other, he surveyed with considerable enjoyment the scene of consternation caused by his two letters. The Inspector, speechless and perspiring, evoked constables from outer nothingness, whispered hoarsely in their reddening ears, pressed florins into their moist hands and urged them into hastily summoned taxis. Mr. Laurence Borrodaile, King's Counsel, Conservative Member for North-West Utterford, and possible President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division, leaned against the wall, gazing open-mouthed at the slim, brown-eyed boy who carelessly smoked half a cigarette and as carelessly dusted the dry mud from his trousers. When the story got into the papers there would be every kind of spiteful joke from his less successful learned friends at the Benchers' Table, every futile pleasantry would be worn threadbare at the Club, and there would be no holding his daughters, who already affected to mistake him for a London County Council tram conductor and asked the fare to improbable places such as Kennington Oval and Lordship Lane. For the past ten minutes he had been picturing himself giving evidence in court, bowing to the magistrate's compliments, perhaps receiving a holograph letter of praise from the Commandant, and even qualifying for the vacant serjeantship of his section. . . . The Prince, for all his radiant, unwrinkled youth, looked a man of the world, and Borrodaile half framed a form of apology; the initiative, however, lay with the Inspector, and the bonds of constabulary discipline had entered into his soul.

Yet it was Henley who had the hardest part to play. The Kitten's eyes hardly left his face, and it was not easy to maintain indefinitely an expression of ingenuous surprise. Once or twice he turned to Borrodaile, shaking his head, makin play with his hands and whispering with agitat rapidity. Once, too, the Inspector approach him and confided hoarsely that he ought to stan up.

For twenty minutes the four men stood or sa in the stifling, whitewashed room gazing periodically at their watches staring blankly at th gas, or trying to read the official almanac on the wall above the Inspector's desk. The scratching o the quill, the scrape of boots as Henley or Borrodaile shifted uneasily from one foot to the other were the only sounds that came to mingle with the clock's ticking. The exhausted air was acrid with the smell of warm ink, and two of the men had been more than eighteen hours out of bed.

All but the Kitten stirred eagerly when the door at last opened, and one of the policemen entered and made his report. He came in alone, which made the Inspector raise his eyebrows, and whispered something that produced an impatient frown.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, turning over to the Kitten's chair. "Captain Osborne [illegible] at home, though the note was left for him. Perhaps it'd save time if you 'ad the kindness to give the name of another gentleman. I have to [illegible] out instructions."

The Kitten turned a little anxiously to the policeman.

"Was no one in?" he asked.

"Only the servant, sir."

"Then I think I had better wait until Lord Eynsham comes. There are not many people that I care about disturbing at this hour of the night. If you want to see anyone after he's come, you'd better send to the Italian Embassy."

He closed his eyes, sank deeper into his chair, and composed himself for slumber. Silence descended once more on the room, only broken by the [illegible] indefatigable pen. The policeman had [illegible] under orders to wait outside till summoned, and Hen[illegible] and Borrodaile, propped against the wall, let their heavy eyes close and their mouths fall open until a spasmodic backward jerk of the head awakened them involuntarily and set them blinking and gaping [illegible] the inexorable face of the clock.

It was a quarter to three before the second policeman returned. He, too, entered alone, then glanced in some perplexity at the Kitten and laid a note on the Inspector's desk. The Kitten's heart quickened its beat as he saw it being read; Lord Eynsham might be ill, he might have left London suddenly, he might be dressing before venturing into the autumn night; there were a dozen reasons why he should write instead of coming in the policeman's taxi, but none that was wholly convincing. And Lord Eynsham was the last hope; if he failed, there was no possibility of release until Legrange could be summoned in the morning.

The Inspector finished reading the letter, removed his glasses, put them on again, and read it a second time. Staring hard at the Kitten, he came round from behind his desk, made as though to hand over the letter, and then thought better of it.

"This is Lord Eynsham's reply, sir," he said. "Dated from the Semiramis Hotel.

"To the OFFICER IN CHARGE,
"Tullis Street Police Station, S.W.

"SIR,—I have been handed a note, purporting to come from H.H. Prince Christoforo of Catania, and confess that I am at a loss to understand it. The Prince, who reached London yesterday, arrived at this hotel to-day and, in consequence of a slight chill contracted in crossing, has not left it since. I have ascertained that he is at this moment in bed and, no doubt, asleep. It would appear that some ill-disposed person is using his name, and the fact should, I venture to suggest, be reported in the appropriate quarters. I shall take occasion to put the Foreign Office and Italian Embassy on their guard to-morrow morning and shall try to warn the Prince, whom I have the honour of knowing slightly. If my services as intermediary be of use to you, they are at your disposal. Any action that has to be taken to-night may, I think, safely be left to your discretion.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,

EYNSHAM"

The Inspector looked up from the letter.

"Can you explain this, sir?" he asked, in a voice half menacing, half still deferential.

"Lord Eynsham has been misinformed," answered the Kitten, struggling to keep his face composed and his voice level, but achieving almost too detached a carelessness of tone. For self-control he would have done well to model himself on Henley, who was once more ingenuously surprised. Relief or disappointment, perplexity or enlightenment, conflicting thoughts as he remembered and tried to reconcile Miss Franklin's warning with Eynsham's behaviour the previous evening, went unreflected in his plump, good-humoured face. And for all the embarrassments of his own position, the Kitten found time disinterestedly to admire the man's passive mask at the moment of his scheme's shipwreck.

The Special Constable, leaping from one extremity of emotion to another, was vindictive where, a moment before, he had been abased.

"What do you propose to do, Inspector?" he inquired.

The Inspector blew his nose thoughtfully, carried away the letter to his desk and read it once again.

"'I have ascertained . . .'" he began aloud.

"If, thanks to your officiousness, the Prince is being kept here," the Kitten interrupted pettishly, "he cannot very well be also at the Semiramis."

The word "officiousness" flicked the Inspector on the raw. He raised a fat white hand for silence and, when he spoke, used the sing-song superiority of tone common to men who are with difficulty keeping their temper.

"There's no call for personalities," he said loftily. "If the Prince is 'ere, 'e can't be at 'is hotel; and, if 'e's at 'is hotel, 'e can't be 'ere. The question is, 'Where is 'e?' Is there anyone else you'd like to write to?"

"You know I can't get hold of anyone at this time of night."

"There's the Foreign Office," suggested Borrodaile, feeling himself in danger of degenerating into a mere onlooker.

"They're all in bed!" was the unguarded answer. "Good God, man! it's nearly three!"

"There are men on duty all night at the Foreign Office, Inspector," said Borrodaile.

He spoke over the head of the Kitten, directing himself to the highest dignitary present. Henley remained still artistically aloof, but the Inspector no longer wavered.

"It's no go, sir," he said to the Kitten. "If you can't get no one to identify you—let alone this 'ere letter from Lord Eynsham——"

"Are you going to keep me here?"

"No choice, sir."

Like many another frightened man, the Kitten became threatening.

"You'll look pretty small when Major Legrange comes round," he predicted.

"I can't 'elp that, sir," said the Inspector in the same sing-song voice. "Orders is orders." He turned to Henley and Borrodaile. "You gentlemen will be wanted to give evidence; I'd like to 'ave your names and addresses."

The Kitten sprang up excitedly, looking significantly from the Inspector to Henley.

"But—but—but you're not going to let him go and keep me here?" he demanded.

"'E ain't done nothing," answered the Inspector easily, as he noted the two witnesses' addresses. "If you care to sign your name to a counter-charge, that's a different pair of shoes *al*together."

The rarest courage is "three o'clock in the morning courage," and it is seldom found in men of one-and-twenty. The Kitten had committed himself deeply and slipped easily from one low level to another, beginning with an assault and ending with the employment of a false name. His determination quailed, however, at the prospect of appearing in court and elaborating a counter-charge signed by Prince Christoforo, when that personage was in all probability inquiring vindictively who had presumed to impersonate him; to sign in his own name ruled out all hopes of an early release at the instance of Legrange. He threw away his cigarette, shrugged his shoulders, and resumed his seat.

In another moment the room was almost deserted. With a policeman on either side, the Kitten had been led away; the Inspector was once again scratching his head over the letter, and Henley and the Special

Constable were grasping hands and wishing each other good night on the doorstep.

"Dangerous fellow!" said Borrodaile, shaking his head professionally. "Of course, anyone could see he *wasn't* a prince, but I must say it all came very pat. I don't want to criticize a superior officer, but I thought the Inspector was a bit too lenient with him; he'd have been in a pretty fix if the first fellow—Osborne, was his name?—had turned up. 'Prince Christoforo's compliments,' says our rascal. 'Oh, this is Prince Christoforo,' says Osborne. 'I've known him for all my life.' What could the Inspector do? He'd have had to apologize and let him go."

Henley stroked his beard with a thumb and first finger.

"Say, why did he trouble old man Eynsham, anyway?" he inquired.

"*Un bon geste,*" answered Borrodaile, with what he conceived to be a Parisian shrug. "A title always tickles the groundlings; you saw how the Inspector was impressed. Oh, he's a silly drunken boy who doesn't know how much he can take, picks a quarrel, gets into trouble and is then afraid of his people hearing about it. The idea was ingenious—a little too ingenious; it made me suspicious at once." A taxi turned into Tullis Street and came slowly towards them. "Can I give you a lift anywhere? I'm for Charles Street, Berkeley Square."

"Guess I'm the other way, I thank you. I'm in your debt, Mr. Borrodaile; I reckon you just about saved my life to-night, and you can say I said so. Good night, and my thanks."

Walking slowly down Tullis Street, Henley entered Duke Street and turned in the direction of St. James'. The sound of Borrodaile's taxi, running north into Piccadilly, grew fainter and died away; two men, striding ahead of him, wheeled into Jermyn Street and were swallowed up in the enveloping blackness; it was the most silent, the most desolate, and the darkest hour of a London night in autumn.

Taking a pliant, green cigar from his pocket, he thrust it unlit into the corner of his mouth and rolled it with a chewing movement from side to side. Suddenly it was driven inwards by a blow which tore the leaf and sent the end ploughing painfully into the soft membrane at the back of his throat; at the same time a second blow on the head crushed his hat over his eyes, and a rough textile surface pressed against his face. A long, closely woven garment had been thrown from behind like a lasso and drawn quickly back, breaking the cigar, muffling his face and pinioning his arms.

"It's no good struggling, Mr. Henley," said a pleasant voice. "We're two to one, and you'll only spoil my coat."

A moment later, strong hands impelled him up two steps; a door slammed behind him, and his feet were hurried across a stone floor; then came a flight of stairs, a landing, and a second flight. He walked for a few yards on soft, yielding carpet; then, while two hands stole from behind and gripped his throat, the coat was lowered from his face, the cigar dropped from his lips, and a towel was tied tightly round his mouth. His arms, pinioned to his sides, were next drawn back and the wrists secured with a silk handkerchief; finally, his ankles were bound with a piece of rope, and he was dragged across the room and pushed into a chair.

The speed and silence of each evolution were disconcerting. Henley looked round him to find himself in conventional, furnished bachelor lodgings. A horsehair sofa and two arm-chairs surrounded the fire; a square table, covered by a faded red cloth, stood in the middle; there was an American walnut sideboard against the wall facing the fire, and an empty bookcase, two small chairs, and a bamboo table with a telephone on it opposite the window. A greasy red wall-paper was partially concealed by a print of "Derby Day," a photograph of the Caryatides on the Acropolis, and a butcher's shop study of the nude entitled "The Bath."

Henley's eyes, rapidly sweeping the room, came to rest on his assailants. One was a smiling, powerful man of middle height in a naval uniform, the other a tall, loosely knit collection of knees and elbows, with a freckled face surmounted by a mop of red hair. Both were recognizable as members of Prince Christoforo's party of the previous evening.

Bound, gagged, and helpless, Henley was compelled to sit and listen while the tall man rang up the International Police Bureau and asked for Major Legrange.

"Not in, an' they dunno where he is, or what he's doin'," was the report a moment later.

The naval officer shrugged his shoulders and lit a pipe.

"Carry on!" he remarked, with a smile. "Every man for himself. You'll take the right, I'll take the left."

Within fifty seconds Henley's pockets had been emptied and the contents spread on the table. The two men made a hurried examination of a cigar-case, watch, chain and charm, key-ring, note-case, some small change, and a half-empty match-box. His papers, which they scrutinized closely, consisted of a receipted bill for a cabinet of cigars, an invitation to a Press Association dinner, and an appeal for funds on behalf of a North London Fever Hospital.

"Nothing here," said the naval officer, restoring the property to the pockets whence it had come. "Funny thing, he's apparently quite unarmed. Well, the only thing to do now is to shave the beard off. Get to work with a pair of scissors first, then the razor. If you'll take the gag out, I'll twine my fingers lovingly round his neck, and, if he makes the sound of a pin dropping, I'll squeeze the life out of him. Get a move on. We've a lot to do before daylight."

The tall man hesitated.

"Supposin' he's the wrong man, what?" he objected.

"What's the odds? We've backed our fancy and, if we lose, we're broke. We couldn't be much more broke if we bashed his head in with the tongs and, having gone so far, we shan't get much mercy for just sparing one unhygienic beard. Hurry up, man! You may have to barb for a living before you're much older. This is really where the fun begins."

CHAPTER XX

PRINCES AND THEIR FATES

THE sun of an autumn morning, shining fitfully through the windows of the Semiramis dining-room, shed a wistful smile over the choleric but restrained faces of a number of elderly men and women. Day after day the wives bowed to their neighbours and acknowledged their waiter's greeting; day after day their dyspeptic husbands reminded themselves that breakfast-table invective must be checked in a public place, sighed, rapped out their orders, "Filets of sole, ham and eggs, coffee—you *know* I always take coffee; for God's sake don't ask me that every morning!" and buried their noses in the middle page of the "Times." Wives who learned nothing and forgot everything would sometimes, because they saw no chance of getting the paper themselves, violate the ensuing silence to read extracts from the letters of old school-friends; wives who had learned anything at all gorged themselves with tea and rusks in their bedrooms.

General Kavanagh breakfasted alone. He had told his wife so often that London never suited her, that she almost believed it and consented to live uncomplainingly, if not happily, in the County Sligo, doing good by day and cheating at demon patience in the long evenings. Pat was always late in the mornings; she pretended to be sleepy after her late nights at the canteen, but in reality deferred her appearance until her father was fortified with three courses and two cups of coffee.

"Ye look washed out, Patsy," he observed, finishing his marmalade and looking at her over the top of his paper, as she sat down. "Ye'll have to drop this canteen work. Did the Prince see you home last night?"

Pat's pale cheeks coloured.

"He . . . he came much too early," she said. "So I told—asked him not to wait. One of the—the equerries was there too, and he came across the Park with me. Is there any news, daddy?"

He threw the paper across to her, and she looked through it with anxious eyes. Apparently no hint of the attack by the Mall had reached Printing House Square when the paper went to press, and she had to control herself to prevent an audible sigh of relief breaking from her lips. In the long wakeful hours of the night she had reconstructed and lived again through the agony of the unseen fight; even now she had only to shut her eyes to hear again the hum of a whirling stick and Nap Fenwick's heavy breathing, followed by the crack as of a crushed eggshell, a lingering moan, silence, and the toppling collapse of a human body. She did not ask herself who had provoked the quarrel, a life had been taken by violence, she had looked for the first time on a dead man, and in her disordered imagination she stood branded with the mark of Cain. But the news had not reached the papers—yet; and possibly her share in the tragedy would never be made public.

At ten o'clock she kept her father company as usual in his walk to the War Office. As she hurried along by his side, the first feelings of horror became mitigated by curiosity; she felt that she must find out what had happened to Fenwick after their parting, and a call at Osborne's flat was an excuse to assure herself that the Kitten had made his way safely home from Victoria.

Crossing Whitehall, she passed through the Horse Guards and made her way to the Duke of York's Steps. It may have been a trick of imagination, but the Mall seemed unusually full, and she fancied that she could see a crowd collecting on the path opposite St. James' Palace. Waterloo Place and Pall Mall were in their customary mid-morning condition of staid desolation, but, as she turned into St. James' Street, a cart rattled up and stopped outside the Thatched House, and the driver flung down a bundle of papers. Framed at the back in a wire cage was a glaring contents-bill, and she could read in ten-inch red letters, "Brutal Murder in St. James' Park." The sight unnerved her, and forgetting her call she jumped into a taxi and drove desperately to the Semiramis.

Entering by the Greenfield Street door, she passed into the lounge. The last late breakfaster had gone, it was still too early for the luncheon visitors, and Lord Eynsham, smoking a cigar and working through his correspondence, was in undisputed possession. She would gladly have avoided him and slipped unseen to her room, but, as she crossed to the staircase, he pushed back his chair, exchanged his horn-rimmed reading spectacles for a pair of double-lensed eyeglasses, and gathered up his papers.

"Good morning, Lord Eynsham," she said, holding out her hand. "It's much too fine to sit indoors writing."

He peered at her uncertainly through narrowed lids.

"Ah, Miss Kavanagh!" he exclaimed at length. "I'm so blind, I couldn't see who it was. No, you're right; I ought to be out, but I've had a good many letters to write, and now I'm waiting for an audience with the Prince. Have you seen him to-day?" She shook her head. "I suppose he couldn't go to meet you last night, with his chill?"

"I hope it isn't serious," she said, evading his question.

"Oh, I think not—an ordinary boat chill; he seemed quite all right at luncheon. I haven't seen him myself, but I understand he had a good bake in the Turkish bath and went straight to bed. I must try to see him before he goes out."

He rang a bell and asked for the head waiter.

"Did the manager give my note to the Prince?" he asked, when the man arrived.

"Yes, my lord. His Highness sent his compliments and was sorry that he couldn't see anyone at present."

"He's no worse, is he?" Eynsham inquired, with some concern.

"Oh no, my lord, he's just staying in the room for a little." He hesitated, and his brows contracted. "A very awkward thing's happened, my lord; some one seems to have broken into His Highness's suite and made off with a lot of his clothes. At least, that's what it looks like, but I don't understand it at all."

He shook his head bewilderedly, anxious for the honour of his hotel.

"When did this happen?" asked Pat, with growing interest.

"We don't know, miss. I haven't seen His Highness myself, but I understand from the reception clerk that he arrived here late in the afternoon yesterday and went straight from his room to the Turkish bath. When he got back and wanted to dress for dinner, he found half his clothes gone. The manager's with him now." He paused and shrugged his shoulders. "He's in a terrible state about it."

"Was anything else taken?" Eynsham inquired.

"I understand, not, my lord. The extraordinary thing is that the door was locked the whole time, and the only people with keys are the valet and chambermaid, who have been here for years. . . . Besides, the valuables are untouched. Such a thing has never happened since I've been here."

He withdrew, shaking his head like a venerable, sententious leader of a Greek chorus. Lord Eynsham drummed on the writing-table with his fingers.

"The I.P.B. will be interested to hear this," he said at length. "Perhaps they'll be able to read some meaning into it."

"The I.P.B.?" Pat echoed.

"The International Police Bureau. They specialize in foreign crime and work with Scotland Yard whenever suspicious characters are known to be moving from one country to another. A man like the Prince is always liable to be attacked by Nihilists, fanatics, and so forth, and it's the duty of the I.P.B. to guard him. I'm expecting a visit from them any moment."

The girl looked at him inquiringly.

"It's a very complicated business," he went on, frowning in perplexity. "There's some one in London at this moment giving himself out to be the Prince and using the Prince's name."

"Wha—what an extraordinary thing!" said Pat breathlessly. "What is he doing it for?"

The surprised interest was too perfect to be natural, but Lord Eynsham was, happily, too short-sighted to be observant.

"Not for any *good* purpose," he answered significantly. "I had a call at two o'clock this morning from a policeman who brought me a letter and wanted me to go round to the Tullis Street Police Station and identify a man there. What his offence was, I don't know; but he had given himself out to be Prince Christoforo, and the police were naturally a little doubtful how to deal with him. Well, it seemed to me so unlikely that the Prince could really have been falling foul of the police that I made one or two inquiries and found that he had never left the hotel the whole evening."

"What did you do?"

"I wrote to the officer in charge and gave him the facts. Just as a precaution I communicated this morning with the Foreign Office and the Embassy, and sent a line to the I.P.B. Frankly, I didn't regard the thing as more than the freak of some silly boy who had got himself locked up and imagined he could get out by using the most impressive name he could think of. This robbery looks more serious. Of course, there may be no connection, but two incomprehensibles are always more suspicious than one. That's why I wanted to see the Prince; after your father's very pleasant party yesterday I felt sure he wouldn't think me officious for offering a word of warning."

For a moment Pat almost made up her mind to tell the old man everything she knew; she was restrained by the reflection that she knew so very little and that what she knew was almost uniformly unfavourable. Two nights before, the Kitten had undoubtedly posed as Prince Christoforo, his friends aiding the deception; a reason for the original imposture had, indeed, been given her, but a large number of people had been deceived, and for all she knew it might be an offence for a man to wander through London enjoying a false title and dignity. The mysteries of English law, sufficiently formidable to lawyers, were a nameless horror to a girl of seventeen. Running through and under and round the imposture were plots and counterplots, of which she understood nothing, culminating in an assault and the violent death of a man unknown not only to her but even to him who compassed his death. Pat would have given much to blot that last memory from her mind. She saw again the red poster with its glaring legend and could picture the police following clue after clue until a hand descended on her shoulder, and she was charged with complicity in murder. Somewhere in her mind there lingered a reassuring thought that she could hardly be hanged because in her presence one man had killed another in self-defence, but of the vendetta she knew so little that perhaps both men were equally to blame. Whatever happened, she could do nothing until she had seen Fenwick.

Her reflections were interrupted by the arrival of a page-boy followed by a tall man with a drooping cavalry moustache.

"My name is Major Legrange," he informed Lord Eynsham. "We got your note at the Bureau this morning, and I came round at once."

As they shook hands, Pat rose to leave them, but the old man laid his hand on her arm.

"Don't leave us, Miss Kavanagh," he said. "You may possibly be able to help us. Let me introduce Major Legrange. What I'm going to tell you, Major, is known already to Miss Kavanagh, who is a friend of the Prince."

In almost the same words as he had used before, he told again the story of his early-morning visitor and followed it with the head waiter's account of the stolen clothes. Legrange listened without interruption until the end.

"I must see the Prince again," he said, when the tale was done. "Are any of his equerries here?"

Lord Eynsham shook his head.

"I had to get the manager to take up my letter," he said.

Legrange moved to the writing-table and wrote a short note.

"I'll do the same," he said, ringing the bell. "I must see the Prince at once."

There was silence for a few moments as a page-boy hurried away with the letter; then Pat summoned up her courage and turned to the Major.

"Then you think there *is* some connexion?" she asked.

"I should be sorry to have to define it," he answered, with a laugh. "I can say this, though: a number of very strange things have happened since the Prince landed in England two days ago, and each new strange thing that crops up I'm inclined to throw into the common stock in the hopes of being able to find its proper place afterwards." He drew an early edition of the "Night Watchman" from his pocket and handed it to her. "Have you seen that?"

It was all that she could do to repress a scream. The paper described how a dead man had been found that morning in St. James' Park with his head horribly wounded; it suggested no motive for the crime and hinted at no one criminal. That her attention should be drawn to it by a man in Legrange's official position seemed a calculated device to make her betray herself.

"How dreadful!" she shuddered.

"It was. A very unpleasant sight."

"You saw it?"

"I was sent for at once. The man was rather an old friend of mine—oh, I only use the word in a professional sense; he and I have been watching each other for some years. To look at him, you'd say he was a mild, shabby old scholar—the kind you see by the dozen in the British Museum Reading Room, and I know that his second greatest interest in life was chess. The first, unfortunately, was crime—the ingenious crime you might expect from a chess player. He was always suspected of having planned the assassination of the Grand Duke Vladimir—before your time, Miss Kavanagh, but Lord Eynsham will remember it; I suppose a more diabolically cruel man has never darkened this earth."

Pat thought of the studded iron ball and shuddered again.

"He's well out of the way," said Eynsham.

"Yes, but I'd give something to know who killed him. That's another of the 'strange things' I was speaking of; I've been watching two men very closely for the last forty-eight hours; both disappeared yesterday afternoon, and I find one unaccountably dead this morning. The other is still missing, and, until I find him, the Prince will have to walk warily. Otherwise . . ."

He broke off as the manager entered the lounge and came up to him.

"His Highness is seeing no one at present," he announced.

There was that in his tone which suggested that the message had been given him in less suave form than that in which he handed it on.

Legrange shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"He's getting very formal all of a sudden," he exclaimed. "I should have thought after our interview yesterday that he could have received me in a dressing-gown; it's not as though I were a stranger. Well, well, I'd better go down to Tullis Street and find out who this fellow is who's taking the Prince's name in vain."

He was getting up to go, but Pat stopped him. Her mercurial mind had bounded from depression to exaltation, and now that she was no longer threatened with the dock, now that she learned that Fenwick's victim was a ruthless assassin, now that the Kitten and his friends were likely to be regarded as public heroes rather than as masquerading schoolboys, she was determined to snatch her own share of the fruits of victory.

"I believe I know who he is," she told the Major.

"You know? How?"

"Well, it's only a guess."

"But who is he?" Legrange asked eagerly.

"I can't tell you yet, because I promised not to tell anyone, but I believe a man said he was the Prince last night to protect the real Prince. If I'm right, I want you to promise that you'll use your influence to help him."

"But, my dear lady . . ."

"It'll be worth your while, Major Legrange," she went on, with an ingratiating smile. "Won't you promise?"

"I can promise nothing as vague as that."

Pat sighed and rose from her chair. Both men were staring at her in astonishment.

"Then it's no use discussing it," she said, holding out her hand. "Good-bye. I've got to pay a call before lunch."

"But, Miss Kavanagh, it's essential that I should hear more of this."

"It is essential that you should promise to help my friend," she answered, with a pout, woman-fashion, preferring person to principle. "I've said it'll be worth your while. As soon as you've promised I'll tell you who killed that man last night in the Park."

Legrange gazed down at the smiling face before him. The cheeks were still pale, and the dark eyes were circled with darker rings, but in the smile there was unconcealed triumph.

"What do *you* know about it, young lady?" he demanded.

"I was there," Pat answered, turning away and making for the door.

CHAPTER XXI

AN AVERAGE NIGHT IN JERMYN STREET

PAT KAVANAGH went from the Semiramis to St. James' Street at a run which sobered into a walk when she remembered that her hair was up and that she was the only daughter of a General; it quickened again to a run when she recollected that the Kitten was in a police station cell. He had treated her father and herself inexcusably; she never wanted to see him again and had told him so on two occasions, but she did not wish him to remain in his cell an unnecessary hour.

On reaching the flat she inquired for Captain Osborne; he was, after all, the householder, though he seemed to play the part of pocket djinn to Fenwick. On learning that he was not at home, she asked to see Mr. Armitage; only when she was told that Fenwick and Fenwick alone was visible did she muster courage to face him alone.

"I—I hope I haven't disturbed you," she began, with timid apology, as she caught sight of a disordered breakfast-table.

Fenwick looked fiercely at her through one glass and over the top of the other.

"Is it usual for a lady of your age to come unattended to a bachelor's flat?" he inquired.

Pat flushed hotly, as he had intended that she should do.

"*I* can take care of myself," she answered. "Can't *you*? I came to see if you had any news of the Kitten."

"Mr. Markham," he replied with emphasis, "is missing. Henley is missing—or was, when I gave up looking for him at six this morning. Legrange is missing, and I have no doubt that the same may be said of Mr. Armitage, though I have not been round to his rooms yet to inquire. Why we aren't missing I don't know," he went on, with ill-suppressed bitterness. "I thought we should be, when I went down over that wire. As an evening it was but moderately successful; beyond killing a total stranger, I don't seem to have effected much. Now you know all that I do."

He tried to speak with a certain sardonic carelessness, but his voice and eyes were those of a worried man.

"I know more than you do," Pat answered with assurance. Like an earlier generation of female students, she felt the need of a pincushion in talking to Nap Fenwick and was prepared, like any girl of her age and race, to leave the Kitten to his fate until she had inflicted three stabs for every one that she had received. "Your murder's in all the papers."

"It wasn't a murder. Do learn the meaning of words."

"Well, homicide, if you prefer it. And the man may have been a total stranger to you, but Major Legrange knew him quite well."

Fenwick looked up with quickening interest.

"You've seen Legrange?"

"Yes. I left him with Lord Eynsham. They were talking about a man who had been giving himself out to be Prince Christoforo of Catania."

Her companion jumped up in exasperation and flung his napkin on to the floor.

"Miss Kavanagh, if you've got anything to say, do for Heaven's sake say it!"

"Well, will you stop trying to pull my leg about coming here alone and that sort of thing?"

"Your language is deplorably vulgar."

"I know. I've been badly brought up, thank goodness. Well, the Kitten—all right, he asked me to call him that—he's locked up in a police station."

Nap Fenwick sighed and nodded his head slowly.

"He was bound to get there sooner or later," he commented. "Which one, and what had he done?"

She told him Lord Eynsham's story and added to it what Legrange had said of the mild old assassin in St. James' Park. Fenwick, too, shuddered a little on hearing it, for he was old enough to remember the fiendish cruelty of the Grand Duke

Vladimir's murder. Finally she told of her efforts to enlist Legrange's aid on the Kitten's behalf.

"You seem to have taken a good deal on yourself," Fenwick observed grudgingly when she had finished.

"Yes, and I've done it jolly well," she retorted. "You got everybody into the mess, and I got them all out of it."

"Have you? I forget whether you've explained to your father and Lord Eynsham exactly whom they've been treating as a Prince; I forget whether you've placated the Prince for the use that's been made of his name."

Pat shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Oh, they don't matter," she declared. "Lord Eynsham will think that you had private information and were acting in the Prince's interests all along; he believes anything I tell him."

"Does your father believe everything you tell him?"

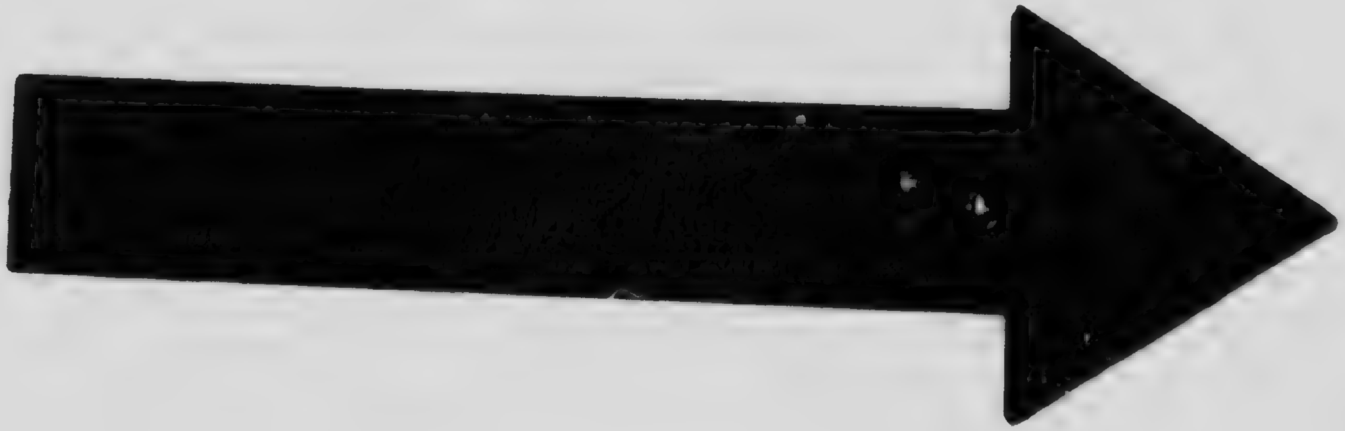
"Daddy 'll just have to lump it."

Fenwick shivered ostentatiously at the word.

"And the Prince?" he inquired after a pause.

"I shall simply avoid him. It won't be difficult to keep out of his way till he goes back."

"It will be difficult for you." Fenwick blew down his pipe and began to fill it. "Mr. Markham is due back at the Front in two days, he has to report on Friday; if he outstays his leave, he'll be



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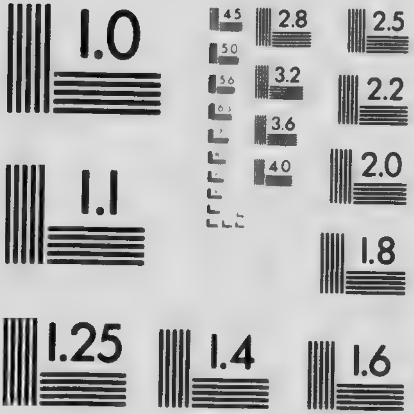

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broken. I don't know what took him to Tullis Street Police Station,—he was probably drunk and disorderly; he *is* inclined to be vicious,—but once there he seems to have committed the most serious offence he could. There is no great harm in giving a false name, but you must be certain that you're not found out; he appears to have been found out. Whether they release him or not in time to get back on Friday, he'll be broken."

Pat's blue eyes grew grave.

"But something must be done!" she exclaimed.

"You're the only person who can do it. Apparently you plume yourself on your ability to make Lord Eynsham believe whatever you tell him; let me recommend you to experiment on the Prince. It is just possible that, if you convince him, he may exert personal influence to get Mr. Markham released. Knowing something of human nature, I can promise you that Legrange will do nothing, unless the Prince makes him—and even then with a bad grace."

"But why should I do your dirty work?" she demanded.

"I arrive at you by a process of exclusion," answered Fenwick in a tone suggesting that by no other method of selection would she be found worthy. "Captain Osborne and Mr. Armitage are both missing and would both refuse, if asked; I refuse without being asked—I used to know the Prince slightly and I don't choose to tell him the use to which his name was put two nights ago. He is a man of ready temper."

"So you leave it to a girl . . ." Pat began, but was interrupted by the shattering slam of a taxi door in the street under their windows. It was followed by the noise of hurrying feet and the grating of a latch-key. Then Osborne, in an unwonted condition of excitement, burst into the room with Armitage at his heels.

"What have you done with the Kitten?" he demanded; then he caught sight of Pat and clutched at his hat, with a murmured "Mornin'."

"I think you said Tullis Street Police Station?" answered Nap Fenwick indifferently, turning to Pat.

"He's not assin' about there *still*?" exclaimed Osborne. "We left him there at two-thirty and were relyin' on you to bail him out. We had an average night's work, what? Hadn't we, Tony?"

"So had I, so had I," Fenwick answered, and told them of the night attack and his long, fruitless vigil. "Not that I could have done much if I'd been here; the Kitten appears to have been running amok and giving a false name to the police. What happened to you two? I said you were to follow the Kitten and see that he didn't come to any harm."

"We did our best," answered Osborne, "but I told you it was an average evenin'. We've bin

qualifyin' for the Fourth Class of the Order of E
in Eruption or whatever Christoforo sticks
humble friends with. Tell him, Tony, while I
Miss Kavanagh a drink. Oh, are you sure ? I
just the time for it, you know, what ? "

Armitage slid down from the corner of the brea
fast-table on which he had been sitting.

" I don't know that I ought to tell this in front
Miss Kavanagh," he began.

" She admits she has been badly brought up
Fenwick interposed.

" Oh, that makes it much more friendly. We
a short time after you had walked into the simp
trap set by the ingenious Henley, we induced th
ingenious Henley to walk into a simple trap set b
us. The Kitten had banged him over the hea
for some reason, and we came to the corner b
Lancaster House just as he was being marched of
The fact that Henley was there at all struck us a
suspicious, so we decided to wait and see, as the
say. After about an hour Henley came along with
out the Kitten, so we tooled on ahead into Jermy
Street, hid ourselves in the doorway of the hous
where I'm staying, and flung my coat over his hea
as he came along. Then we pushed him up int
my rooms, tied his hands and feet, and stoo
by to settle once and for all who and what he
was."

He paused at the exactly right moment to light a
cigarette. Pat Kavanagh was gazing at him with

eager blue eyes, and even Fenwick's academic preference for unassailable legality was now merged in common curiosity. Blood is dirtier than most water, and the recital promised to show that the hands of all were equally stained.

"Osborne lost his head," Armitage resumed. "I preserved what the French call my *sangfroid habituel*. Of course, we *were* in the devil of a position, because, if he'd turned out to be a member of Parliament or an actor manager, we should have found it difficult to put up a good story. However, I'd made up my mind to get Legrange round, tell him all the later evolutions and see if he could identify his man at close quarters. Then, if we were wrong, I proposed to slip Henley into my bed and clear out somewhere—Lionel suggested Brighton—till it was time to rejoin. Well, we couldn't get Legrange on the telephone, so Lionel and I had to carry on by ourselves. We took the towel out of his mouth, I kept a finger on his windpipe in case he showed any tendency to shout, and Lionel put in some pretty work with a pair of nail-scissors. He clipped away the cocoanut matting, lathered the remains, and made a good job of a bad face."

Nap Fenwick sprang excitedly from his chair.

"Was he our man ?" he cried.

Armitage slowly inclined his head.

"Lionel identified him," he said. "I never saw the photo, of course, but there was certainly a great

gash running down his chin, which I gather is w
you were looking for. Lionel had a look and s
'The game's up, Mr. Henley.' Poor devil!
looked sickish; you're not at your best when yo
tied hand and foot and have just been forc
shaved. It seemed about time for drinks all rou
so I offered him one, and he just nodded his h
There was no question now of his giving any kin
alarm, so we made him a bit easier and went
to bed for a bit. That's the story, and the
thing to do now is to get hold of Legrange and
the Prince know that all's well."

Pat jumped up from her chair.

"I'm seeing the Prince," she announced. "C
tain Fenwick hinted that he was afraid to and t
you and Captain Osborne would refuse."

"If you want that honour," said Armitage, w
a wry smile, "I shouldn't dream of depriving
of it. I hope Legrange will feel that the
justifies the means, but I don't look forward
explaining things even to him. Does anyone kn
where he is?"

"When I saw him," answered Pat, "he
trying to get an audience with the Prince, but
Prince was refusing to see anyone. If he refu
to see me . . ."

Nap Fenwick waved away the objection.

"Tell him," he said majestically, "that, if he
look between the mattresses of the bed in the
joining suite, he will find all he wants."

"But how . . ." Pat began, opening her blue eyes wide with surprise.

"Because I put them there," Fenwick interrupted crushingly. "The sooner you go back to the Semiramis, Miss Kavanagh, the sooner we may hope to set Mr. Markham at liberty, but there'll be a lot of machinery to put in motion. Make such excuses and apologies to your father and Lord Eynsham as you think fit; I am going to make a formal report to the International Police Bureau, but I'll walk round with you first and tell you anything that's not yet clear, so that you may make your story at least intelligible. Needless to say, we shall all do our utmost to avoid running into the Prince or any of you for the remainder of our leave." He paused and turned to Armitage and Osborne. "You two—— By the way, in your usual sloppy fashion you've omitted to say where you took Henley to."

"We took him nowhere," Armitage answered, with a smile of unruffled composure. "He's still in Jermyn Street."

"Who's looking after him?" Fenwick inquired suspiciously.

Armitage frowned and tried to intimate that he did not want the subject pursued.

"He's all right," he said shortly. "There's no one looking after him."

Nap Fenwick sprang to his feet, shaking his clenched fists in the air.

"You had him cornered and you left him with a ridiculous bit of string round his wrists. Man! he's a hundred miles away by now! You've ruined all we've done, and he's laughing at us from the other end of England!"

Osborne exchanged glances with Armitage, stepped forward and laid his hands on Fenwick's shoulders.

"If he's laughin' at us," he said, lowering his voice, "it's from the other side of Hell, what? His body's lyin' in Jermyn Street—with a sheet over it."

Pat turned suddenly pale and her hand flew to her lips.

"You've not killed him—too?" she gasped.

"He saved us the trouble, Miss Kavanagh," said Armitage gently. "I wanted to keep off this part, but Captain Fenwick would have it. His hands were untied when we gave him the drink, and I left them untied, because I knew he was unarmed, and there didn't seem much that he could do with both of us in the room. When I'd finished my own drink, I filled a pipe and offered him a cigar—there seemed no reason why we shouldn't make him as comfortable as possible; he was sitting with his eyes closed, so I repeated the offer and then went over to the other side of the room and discussed with Captain Osborne what we were to do with him. A little while afterwards I went over to move him full length on to the sofa for the night and noticed a little charm dangling from his watch chain and hanging open. Whatever it had contained must have been quick and quiet in its action."

"He was coolin' already," Osborne added.

CHAPTER XXII

AN AUDIENCE ENFORCED

PRINCE CHRISTOFORO of Catania was seated in front of a bright fire in his sitting-room. Behind his arm-chair stood a tabl strewn with the debris of an elegant luncheon ; a telephone was within reach, and an open dispatch-box lay on his knees. He was smoking a cigar and making marginal notes on the papers before him.

From time to time there came a tap on the door the Prince murmured " Come in," without looking up, and a letter or paper would be brought him. His accent was good, though unmistakably foreign with slightly less clear-cut pronunciation and a greate readiness to clip his words and murder his vowels, his English would have passed as that of an educated clergyman. His appearance, with olive skin, full lips, dark hair and eyes that were almost black, was undisguisedly South European, though a high forehead protruding through thinning front hair lengthened the face out of perfect southern proportion. His features were deliberately expressionless, and the closely shut lips betrayed his thoughts as little as the steady eyes behind their rimless glasses. He looked a man of three or four and thirty and was as unlike the Kitten as two young, dark men can well be.

The Prince had passed a troubled morning. As he breakfasted in bed, the manager had entered to inform him that no trace had been found of the missing garments or of the thief. The Prince had undammed a flow of regrettable expressions which were only checked by a second and greater mystery: the manager suggested in despair that the equerry who had called the previous evening might be able to assist, and the Prince had crushed the suggestion by declaring that he was without an equerry. He spent some time wondering, however, who was passing himself off under this guise and why he was doing it.

Thereafter the manager offered no suggestions and confined himself to delivering notes and carrying messages. In his haste the Prince had said that he would see no one, and the result was that his would-be callers sent him long letters. First of all Lord Eynsham, whom he remembered only as the greatest bore in the whole *corps diplomatique* at Rome, wrote fantastically and at length of some person who appeared to be using His Highness's name; then the International Police Bureau ventured to enclose a copy of a communication from Lord Eynsham and to beg for an audience on behalf of Deputy-Commissioner Major Stuart Legrange, C.B.; finally, a Councillor of Embassy, in the absence of His

Excellency, the Ambassador, humbly submitted memorandum from Viscount Eynsham of Isi formerly Ambassador Extraordinary and Ministe Plenipotentiary in Rome, tending to show certai things that the Prince, willy nilly, by this tim knew verbatim.

Cold game pie, an imperial pint of Burgundy, an a cigar went some way towards restoring his goo humour. As he inhaled the smoke and stretched hi slippered feet to the glowing fire, he felt more contented than at any time since landing in Englan the previous afternoon. His chill had been bake out of him, the luncheon had been good; and, if he chafed at having to sit alone in a blue silk dressing-gown, he knew at least that a young attaché at the Italian Embassy was even now making good the inexplicable despoiling of his wardrobe. Remembering certain of his phrases earlier in the day, he half thought of sending for the manager and explaining that no criticism of the hotel was directed against him personally; then he reflected that the bell was out of reach, and, as his hand stretched out towards the telephone, there was a tap at the door, and he decided to send a message by the waiter who was no doubt now coming to clear his table.

"Come in!" he murmured, turning again to his papers.

The door opened quietly and closed again, as though someone had made a mistake in the number of the room. The Prince sucked at his cigar, scattered some impatient notes of interrogation up and down the margin and finally tossed the paper on to the top of a pile on the floor. Then a thought struck him, and his fingers groped to reclaim the paper; as he turned and bent over the side of the chair, his eyes were attracted by a figure in white standing by the door.

"How long have *you* been there?" he exclaimed, too much surprised to utter any words but those that came first to his lips.

"Since you said 'Come in,' sir," answered a low voice. "I didn't want to disturb you."

The Prince shut the lid of the dispatch-case, placed it on the floor and rose to his feet.

"Are you—sure you're not making a mistake?" he asked, looking in surprise at the slim girl with the dazzling hair and skin. As she came in hatless and coatless, clearly she belonged to the hotel, but he was at a loss to understand the reason of her presence.

"I want to speak to you, sir," she answered.

The Prince glanced down at his blue silk dressing-gown and red morocco slippers.

"I have said that I am not seeing anyone to-day," he replied, with a slight frown.

"But you'll make an exception for me, sir?" she begged in a tone that had caused exceptions to be made to many rules in the last seventeen years.

He looked with surprise and faint displeasure at her pleading blue eyes.

"I don't quite know why I should."

"Because everybody does, sir, and I've aske
you nicely."

The Prince broke into unexpected laughte
Under the skin-deep demureness of manner ther
was a gay, schoolboy frankness and irresponsibility

"Please sit down," he said, drawing a secon
chair to the fire. "As you see, I am hardly in
condition to receive visitors, especially ladies . . ."

"It's a dinky dressing-gown," she murmure
admiringly; then in a tone of apology: "I'm s
sorry, sir! I always say the wrong thing."

"I am glad you like it," he answered a littl
formally. "But may I ask whom I have the honou
of addressing and why I am privileged to receiv
this visit?"

The girl hesitated for a few moments in doub
how to begin.

"I'm Pat Kavanagh," she said at length, "though
that won't tell you anything, and I've come here to
explain a whole lot of things that I don't understand
myself. I—I may as well say at once that I've
never spoken to a real Prince before, so you won't
be down on me, will you? Do you know, sir, that
two men have been trying to kill you since you came
to London?"

"They haven't succeeded," he commented, with
a smile, looking with idle admiration at her beautiful
features and colouring.

"No, sir! Three other men have stopped

them and saved your life. I hope you're grateful, sir."

The Prince bowed with mock gravity.

"Profoundly, Miss Kavanagh," he said.

She was disconcerted by a suspicion that he was not treating her story with becoming seriousness.

"Really?" she asked, with her head doubtfully on one side. "This is all honest injun, you know."

"I should like to hear more," he said, wondering vaguely how much longer he would be able to understand her colloquialisms.

"And you'll promise not to be angry? I can't tell you until you shake hands and promise, because they've been rather dirty dogs, and I don't want to get anyone into trouble."

The Prince gazed at her with raised eyebrows then stretched out his hand and caught her white fingers in his own.

"I promise," he said.

Pat sighed with relief and began her story.

Starting with the masquerade dinner and the episode of the Italian National Anthem, she told the tale as Nap Fenwick had pieced it together and reconstructed it for her, describing the barren burglary at Osborne's flat, Legrange's warning, the suspicious activity of Henley, and the mysterious telephone call of the previous afternoon. The Prince's face, so far as it ever wore an expression, was indicative of a certain sternness and displeasure, as he heard the use to which his name and personality had been put. Sternness gave way to curiosity, as she unfolded the plan for compelling Henley to declare himself, and, when she came to the fight by the Mall, he frankly laid aside his diplomatically inscrutable mask and entered into something of her own agony and horror.

" Describe this Captain Fenwick," he begged her. " I am not sure that I don't know him."

Pat gave a description so candid that the Prince smiled in spite of himself. Then she told of the lamp-lit group by the corner of Lancaster House, the incarceration of the Kitten, the ambush in a Jermyn Street doorway, and the capture and identification of Henley. The Prince's hands tightened their grip on the arms of his chair, as she came to the last phase and described the bound man sitting with his beardless chin on his chest and the poison box hanging open from his watch chain.

When her tale was done, he picked up the telephone and spoke in rapid Italian to some one at the Embassy.

" May I ask why you were deputed to tell me all this ? " he asked, as he put down the instrument and turned to her.

" I think the others funked it, sir," she answered, with an engaging smile. " I mean, as Captain Fenwick knew you . . ."

" I have nothing but gratitude for all of you," he said warmly.

" He had a bad conscience over that dinner, sir," said Pat, who was not sorry to disparage Fenwick a little behind his august back.

The Prince laughed.

" You haven't told me why it was necessary for them to sail under false colours. Had they come here without money ? "

" Oh no, sir, but the others were in evening dress and wanted to dine in the Restaurant, and Mr. Markham had been waiting to see me and hadn't had time to change. They had to impress the head waiter, you see."

Taking a sheet of paper from his case, the Prince began to make a few notes. Her story embraced so many names and places that he felt himself growing confused.

" Christopher Markham ? " he asked. " You say he is the son of the man I knew in Rome ? You didn't tell me that he was a friend of yours. How was it that your father didn't recognize him ? "

Pat blushed in some confusion.

" I hadn't seen him before that night, sir, but he caught sight of me at Victoria, and I suppose he thought he'd like to be friends."

The Prince looked at her bent head with its cloud of fair hair. A gold cross on a slender chain was rising and falling in time to her quick breathing, and the fingers of her blue-veined hands were nervously interlocking. He appreciated that for all her innocent-eyed, schoolboy frankness she was in the throes of painful embarrassment.

"I am not surprised," he murmured, half himself. "And did you reciprocate his wish?"

She looked up with unashamed radiance in h deep blue eyes.

"Of course, sir. He's a dear, and very goo looking. That's why I want you to get him out prison."

"I fancied you were moved by a passion f abstract justice," said the Prince, with feigned su prise. "Well, such small influence as I have at your service. I am sending a note to Maj Legrange asking him to call here, and one of m friends at the Italian Embassy will be here at an moment. I don't know what the procedure is fo liberating young Markham, but no doubt th Embassy and Legrange can between them arriv at some *modus operandi*. I would go round to th Foreign Office myself, but I am unfortunatel confined to my room at present. Now I wonde whether you will add to your kindness by telling m how I can get hold of these gentlemen? I shoul like to express my thanks to them and to meet the personally—particularly Markham."

Pat looked into the fire for some minutes befor answering.

"Forgive me, sir," she said at length, with a goo deal of diffidence, "but I'm afraid they aren't a bi keen to meet you."

The Prince laughed good-humouredly at he frankness.

"Am I so formidable, you very candid young lady?" he inquired.

"No, sir, you've taken it jolly well. I should have made much more fuss if some one had pretended to be me."

"One Prince is very like another, Miss Kavanagh; I cannot imagine anyone quite like you. I hope though that they've not brought me into discredit."

"I'm not sure, sir." In a spirit of pure mischief, because, in her father's words, she had no more control over her tongue than a Dublin market woman, and because her interview was turning out so much less alarming than she had anticipated, she filled in details of the great night of personation, not omitting the Kitten's methods of circumventing licensing restrictions.

"They seem eminently resourceful," was the Prince's only comment.

"You don't mind, sir?"

"I wish I'd thought of it myself. As it is, the knowledge may be of great use to me some day."

There was a sound of footsteps outside the door, followed by a discreet tap, and the manager entered, looking with some surprise at Pat.

"Count Alberoni asks permission to wait on Your Highness," he announced.

"Is there anyone else?" the Prince inquired.

"Lord Eynsham and Major Legrange are still here, sir."

" Ah ! Will you kindly ask them all to come u in five minutes' time ; I will see them together." As the door closed he turned to Pat. " You hav not yet told me how I am to make the acquaintanc of your friends."

The girl considered for a moment.

" Why not command them all to dine with you sir ? " she suggested. " They'd have to com then ; or, if they didn't, you could go and fetc them."

The Prince frowned, and his manner stiffened.

" I hardly care to be surrounded by unwillin guests," he said.

" They wouldn't be unwilling if you invited them personally," she answered, with a winning smile " No more should I."

The Prince looked down into her fearless blue eyes

" Will you dine with me, Miss Kavanagh ? " he asked abruptly.

" If my father will let me," she answered dutifully.

" He will come too, I hope."

" If you can smooth him down after the way the Kitten—I mean, Mr. Markham—has behaved You—you'll do it much better than I shall, sir ; I have to smooth him down over such lots of things. But if you pacify him and Lord Eynsham and then pay a surprise visit to Captain Osborne's flat . . ."

" I'm afraid surprise visits are out of the question," he interrupted. " I can't leave this room."

The girl picked up the Prince's pencil and a sheet of paper from the pile on the floor.

"Captain Fenwick sent a message," she said, as she wrote. "You will do your best to get Mr. Markham out of prison, sir, won't you? I'm sure you'll like him, and he's a great friend of mine."

She walked backwards to the door and, as the Prince stepped forward to open it for her, she handed him a folded note.

"They are between the mattresses in the adjoining suite," he read. PATRICIA KAVANAGH

"P.S.—I think you've been simply ripping.

"PATSY"

The Prince crumpled the note in his hand and tossed it into the fireplace. Then he picked it out, smoothed it, and put it into his pocket.

"I hope Markham turns out to be a decent fellow," he mused.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN PRINCE MEETS PRINCE

SIX o'clock was striking when Lionel Osborn rousing from his dog-sleep in front of blazing fire, rang the bell with the effortles mechanical punctuality of a methodical man an sipped the resultant cocktail.

"Old Nap's takin' his time, what?" he ob served. "I wish he'd hurry up, 'cos I want to clea out of here before old Kavanagh butts in to ca for an apology."

"I think it's up to Nap to stand us all dinner and show," suggested Armitage. "After all, he starte this stunt," he went on, generously making ligl of his own contribution, "and we owe somethin to the Kitten. D'you happen to know the dri for getting a fellow out of quod? I to-day an thou to-morrow, as the poet says; it might com in handy."

Osborne shrugged his shoulders.

"Seein' it's Nap," he said, "you'll probabl find he's dug himself in at the Hendon Flyir School behind a breastwork of the Foreign Secr tary's body-belts, and there he sits with his fac wrapped in a telephone, holdin' the Cabinet to ransom. Nap's a Hun for thoroughness and ingenuity. Meantime the poor Kitten . . ."

He paused as the door opened and slammed. With grimy shirt and collar, unpolished boots, and disordered hair, the Kitten was standing behind his chair, caressing an extra half-day's growth on his chin.

"You unmitigated swine!" he exclaimed, with feeling.

"Cold feet again, Kitten?" asked Armitage. "Have a drink."

"No time," answered the Kitten, reaching for the decanter. "This leave is too much for my nerves; I want to get back to the peace and quiet of a trench. Why didn't you beer-swilling Bosches come and bail me out? If my uncle George knew I'd spent a night in the cells, he'd cut me out of his will."

"We were engaged with one Henley," said Armitage, deliberately dispassionate; then he yawned and thereupon wove into a piece the scattered strands of their exploits overnight. Nap Fenwick came in before the recital was done and added a chapter here and there, taking credit to himself for all things from the original masquerade to the Kitten's ultimate release.

"We saw you bein' run in all right," interposed Osborne, "but Nap's such a man for legality that we didn't dare risk a rescue."

" Nap's standing dinner all round," said Arm tage, " so there's no need for ill-feeling. Wh happened to you, Kitten, after you left me to go Victoria ? "

In his turn the Kitten described how Pat ha peremptorily dismissed him from the canteen ar how, after dawdling about the station in the hop that she would relent, he had finally acted on h advice to go back to the flat in St. James' Stree It was as he walked dejectedly along Buckinghar Palace Road that he became conscious, in an e quisite moment of terror and passion, that furtiv footsteps were pattering behind him. There was n time to be judicial. He accepted Henley's presenc in that place and at that time as a proof of gui and only concerned himself to get in first blow.

" We heard you arguin' with the bobby," Osborn struck in here. " What happened when they g you to Tullis Street ? "

The Kitten dwelt lovingly on his engagemen with the Inspector and gave a picturesque description of the deference inspired by his off-han appeals to Legrange, culminating in the genera dismay when Prince Christoforo of Catania begge Lord Eynsham to deliver him from the excessiv zeal of the London police.

" I thought that would do them," he admitted " and the only trouble was to keep Henley fron apologizing and skipping away. I never dreame that they would take my references up, and it wa a bad moment when the first bobby rolled back to say that there was nobody at home here. I kept smiling, though, because I felt sure dear old Eynsham wouldn't let me down—until he did. That fairly bowled me over—the way the Inspector read out that His Highness was in bed and, no doubt, asleep ; on my honour, from the time when Armitage told me twelve hours before outside here, I'd entirely forgotten that the real man could be in England. Cold feet ! You blighters don't know the meaning of the term ! I was in for a night in the cells, I was in for God-knows-what for using the Prince's name, and I was in for seeing Henley and that forsaken Special Constable marching out arm in arm. I *did* raise a feeble sort of protest, but the Inspector fellow said that, if I wanted to bring a counter-charge, I must sign the sheet. I drew the line at that. You see, when I wrote the letters, I said Prince Christoforo would be obliged and so forth, and, if he's a fellow of common humanity, he *would* be obliged by anybody who saved me a night on a plank bed. It seemed different, somehow, signing in his name, and I was beginning to get a bit rattled. That's all. The next thing I knew was I was being remanded in custody for a week because Henley hadn't turned up to give evidence, and the next thing was Legrange shaking me by the hand and saying everything had been squared. Where's Nap giving us this dinner ? "

" I . . ."

"Shut up, Nap! It's three to one, and I've been disappointed in love. Let's say seven-thirty at the Berkeley, and we can discuss the show afterwards. I must go and shave."

He was starting to the door, when Osborne intervened solicitously.

"Can I help, Kitten?" he inquired. "I'm pretty useful at barbin'."

"Body-snatcher!" cried the Kitten, hurling a cushion and slamming the door behind him before it could be returned.

Left to themselves, the other three yawned and looked simultaneously at the clock. Their broken night had made them sleepy, and all were a little limp with reaction after their excitement. All, too, were uneasy in conscience, and, when the front door bell rang loud and authoritatively, they jumped to their feet and gazed at each other in consternation.

"It's that blasphemin' General!" whispered Osborne, staring apprehensively at the door.

"I'm going to lie down for half an hour before dinner," remarked Fenwick carelessly.

"You hog, Nap! You're not desertin', Tony?"

Armitage dropped back into his chair as Fenwick sidled out of the room.

"I'll see you through," he promised. "What line are you going on?"

"I'm takin' no risks, old son. I shall deny everything, just to be on the safe side, what?"

The door opened, and Merrick announced that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Markham.

" Who is he ? "

" He would give no name, sir."

Osborne exchanged glances with Armitage.

" Show him in," he said.

A moment later a dark young man in morning dress and a fur coat entered and bowed. He was clean-shaven, with a high forehead and regular features, and wore rimless eyeglasses.

" May I ask which is Mr. Markham ? " he began.

" This is not his flat," answered Osborne, faithful to his creed of catholic denial.

" I understood he was staying here," said the stranger. " Perhaps it would be more in order if I asked whether either of you gentlemen is Captain Osborne ? "

Armitage stepped forward with a disarming smile.

" Won't you let us know whom we have the pleasure of addressing ? " he suggested.

" Forgive me for not telling you ! I am Prince Christoforo."

For many moments no one spoke. Then Armitage looked down to the carpet and lowered his voice.

" You have come to accept our apologies, I hope, sir," he said.

" To ask *you* to accept my most grateful thanks, gentlemen," returned the Prince.

Armitage bowed.

" If you will excuse me, sir, I will find Markha for you. May I present Captain Osborne ? M own name is Armitage."

The Prince held out his hand.

" You two gentlemen were responsible for bringin this man Henley to book, I understand ? "

" We were really all in it equally, sir, for better o worse."

Armitage bowed and withdrew, returning a fe minutes later with the last two members of th alliance. Fenwick sidled boldly into the room but the Kitten hung back at the door, blushing lik a girl and unable to raise his eyes from the floor.

The Prince set himself to put every one at ease.

" We are no strangers at any rate, Fenwick," he said, shaking hands. " And you, I take it, must be Mr. Markham." He looked approvingly at the dark hair, small features, and brown eyes ; in appearance, at least, the Kitten had no cause to fear criticism. " I remember your father very well when he was First Secretary ; you, I gather, are flying rather higher than the Diplomatic."

The Kitten looked up quickly to be sure of his meaning, and the two exchanged a smile.

" Not again, sir ! I may be discredited, but I've got out of this alive, and I mustn't tempt Providence."

The Prince selected a chair and motioned to the others to be seated.

" Well, gentlemen," he began, " it's on the question of being discredited that I've come here. From all I can gather, my reputation, after a few hours in your keeping, is that of a man who devotes his time to ordering rooms in obscure hotels to obtain sixteen brandies and soda after closing hours—that is, when he is not engaged in spending his night in a police station."

" Sir ! "

The Kitten stopped as abruptly as he had begun.

" Yes ? " said the Prince encouragingly.

" Sir, did Major Legrange tell you that ? Because if he did . . ."

The Prince laughed.

" No doubt that is my official reputation at his Bureau, but this seems to be a matter of common knowledge. I heard it from the lips of a young lady, who is, I understand, known to you."

" To me, sir ? "

" She described you and herself as being very great friends ; I found it in my heart to envy you. Well, gentlemen, those of you who have not robbed me of my fair name have deprived me of my wardrobe. I think some amends are required. Mr. Armitage has apologized, but, unless you all consent to dine with me to-night, I shall be forced to think that the apology was an affair of words."

" We shall be delighted to come, sir," said Fenwick, speaking for all and triumphantly disposing of any idea that his allies were going to dine at his expense.

The Prince bowed and rose to his feet.

"I made sure that you would not disappoint me," he said. "Indeed, I went so far as to ask General and Miss Kavanagh to join us; I left a note for Lord Eynsham, inviting him to meet us here, but I have not heard whether he can come. Mr. Markham, the General and his daughter are in their car outside; I am sure, if Captain Osborne does not mind, that they would find it warmer and more comfortable to wait here."

The Kitten started to the door, then hesitated with a wry face, and went on again.

"The General is in the best of humour," said the Prince, with a reassuring smile.

"I'm glad to hear it, sir. I rather let fly about the Staff yesterday at lunch."

"So I understood. The General says it was true about the others, and you had the rare tact not to criticize his own branch."

The Kitten darted through the door and reappeared a few moments later in the wake of General Kavanagh and Pat. The Prince effected the necessary introductions and turned to the General.

"I understand that you and your daughter entertained Prince Christoforo to luncheon yesterday. Will you let him entertain you to-night?"

"We are honoured, sir."

"Then, as four of us are staying at the Semiramis, can we find a better place than that?"

Nap Fenwick's jaw dropped, and he intervened hastily.

" There's no better place in London, sir, but I'm afraid our presence there might excite more comment than you'd like."

" I was meaning dinner in my own suite," said the Prince.

Fenwick shook his head deferentially.

" Both Mr. Markham and I should experience some difficulty in facing the head waiter," he said.

The Prince laughed good-humouredly.

" Well, choose your own place," he said. " Or, as Miss Kavanagh is the only lady present, let her decide."

He turned to exchange a few words with Fenwick, and the Kitten crossed the room in obedience to the beckoning of Pat's finger.

" Where shall I say ? " she whispered.

" I don't care, so long as I'm on one side of you, and you don't say a word to the man on the other."

Pat raised her nose haughtily.

" That's for the Prince to decide," she told him.

" His wishes are yours. Have you forgiven me, Pat ? "

" No—and I never will."

" Then why did you tell the Prince we were very great friends ? "

The girl frowned.

" I didn't. And it wasn't fair of him to sneak, anyway. Where are we to go ? "

The Kitten thought for a moment.

"What's the matter with the Carlton?" he asked.

"If you wish it, sir," she answered mischievously.

"Pat, I've asked you not to call me 'sir.' Have you forgotten?"

"I never forget anything, Mr. Markham."

"Then do you remember saying that, if I wasn't a prince . . ."

Pat blushed vividly.

"You're keeping the Prince waiting!" she whispered.

"Let him wait! I waited all night in a cell on his account, and he can wait while I tell you two things." He hesitated, and Pat's blue eyes looked inquiringly into his. "Oh well, I don't suppose you want to know. Tell him the Carlton."

She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Don't be exasperating, Kitten!" she exclaimed.

He could not help smiling at her use of the name.

"We-ell, I wanted to tell you," he said, "that I honestly believe there's no one like you in creation."

She sniffed contemptuously.

"The Prince told me that ages ago—early this afternoon."

"He's got devilish good taste," said the Kitten, looking across the room with an appreciative smile. "The other thing—no, I won't tell you that. It would be mere waste of breath, if you haven't forgiven me, and we're never going to be even great friends."

Her eyes looked into his for a moment; then swiftly fell.

"Please tell me, Kitten," she coaxed.

"I'll tell you if you care enough for me to come to Victoria to see me off. Now do tell the Prince, or he'll be simply furious."

She walked across to the fireplace and declared her choice. While she was speaking, the door opened and Lord Eynsham was ushered in to complete the party. The Prince bowed to him and looked at his watch.

"The Carlton let it be, then," he said. "I have an appointment with the Foreign Secretary later on, so perhaps you will excuse an early dinner. By the way, will it be all right if we go in these clothes?"

Nap Fenwick stepped forward and threw open the door.

"Perfectly, sir," he replied. "If there's any trouble, I can always tell the head waiter that you didn't have time to dress."

"You always *do*," commented the Prince. "Still, it doesn't lie in my mouth to complain."

CHAPTER XXIV

LEAVE'S END

As the leave train steamed out of Victoria on the following Friday, an artillery lieutenant leaned bare-headed out of the window, waving to a blue-eyed girl with fair hair who ran along the platform, crying, "Good-bye, Kitten darling! Good luck!"

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